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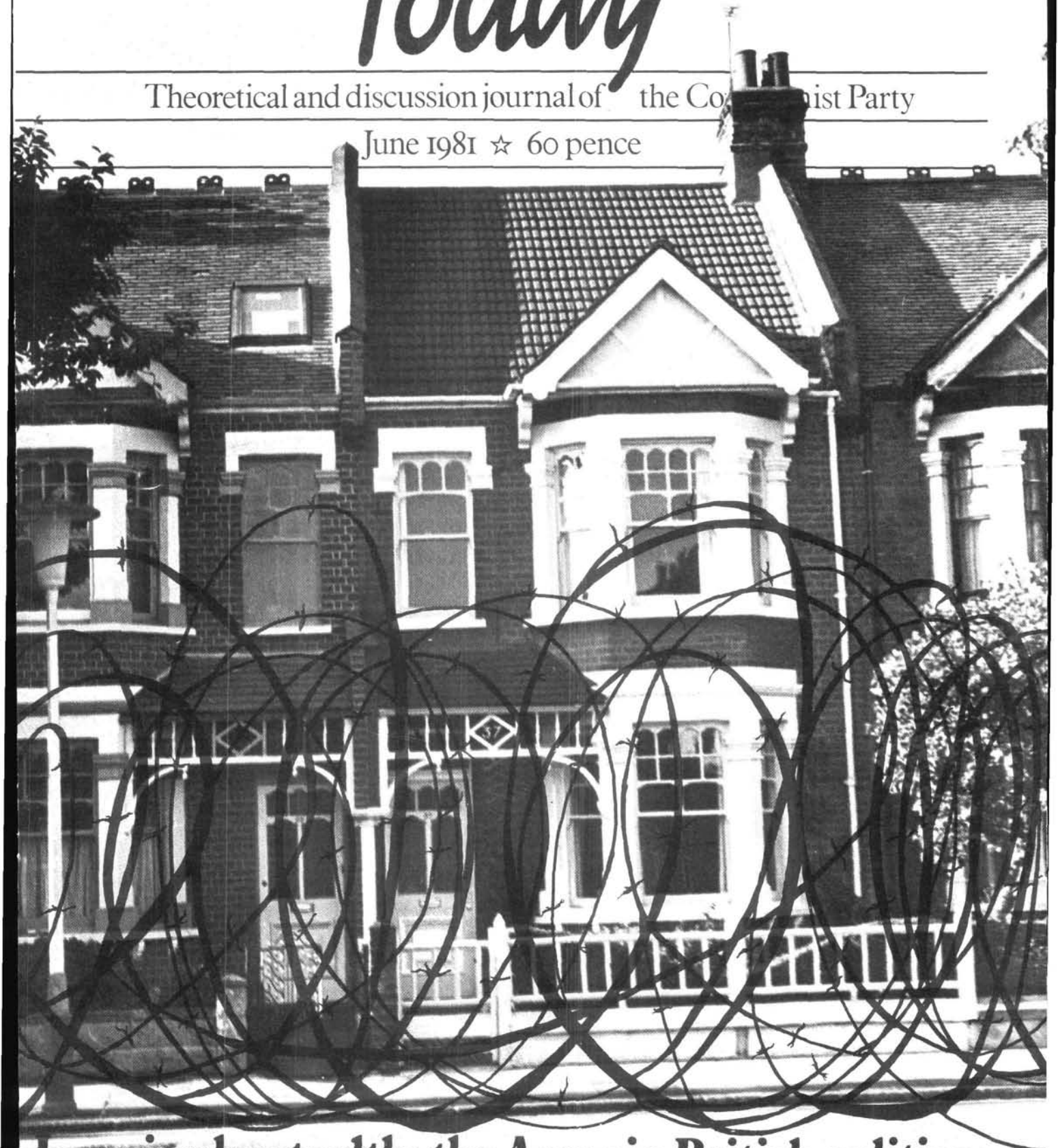

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Marxism Today

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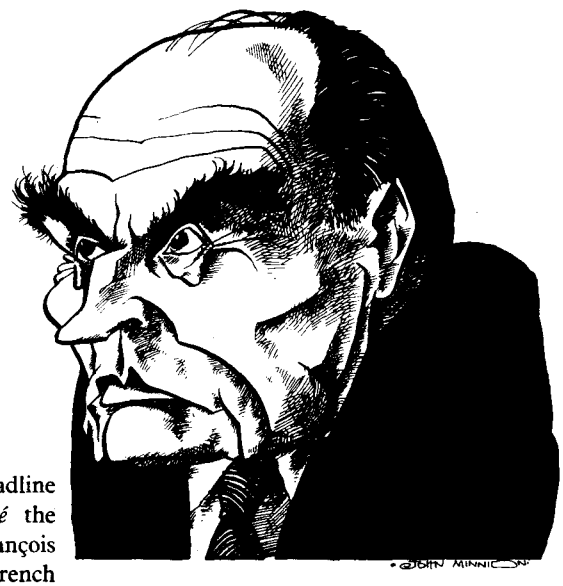

FRANCE TURNS LEFT

'Victory for hope' was the banner headline across the front page of *l'Humanité* the morning after the election of François Mitterrand as President of the French Republic. The same emotion was expressed by the tens of thousands — Socialists, Communists and many people simply celebrating the release from over two decades of paternalist and technocratic rule — who turned the Place de la Bastille over to a national carnival when the election result was announced on May 10.

Whether that date will go down as one of the great turning points in French history may be decided in what will surely be difficult weeks and months ahead, as the defeated Right attempts to undermine whatever gains the French working people make. For the present, the election of the Socialist Party leader, so unexpected only a few weeks before the dramatic event, has released energies on the Left, and across an even wider spectrum of opinion, that have been bottled up and frustrated for nearly a generation.

Nothing in French politics this month looks quite the same as it did before May 10. And that applies, too, to many of the positions taken by the parties of the Left. Strategies are having to be quickly revised as the Left parties face new exigencies in uncharted political territory.

Like Salvador Allende of Chile, a man he admires, François Mitterrand has been elected to the Presidency at his third attempt — by 15,714,598 votes (51.75%) against 14,647,787 (48.24%) for the right wing Giscard d'Estaing. He could also be faced — as Allende was — with a hostile Parliament dedicated to obstructing his programme. In 1974, Mitterrand was narrowly defeated in his second attempt. He obtained then 49% of the votes against Giscard, compared with the 44% he had achieved in challenging General de Gaulle in 1965.

In both 1965 and 1974, Mitterrand stood as the single candidate of the main Left parties; in 1974, he was the banner carrier of the Common Programme for Government, drawn up by the Communist, Socialist and Left Radical Parties two years before. But in 1977, the Union of the Left broke up (or at least was put back in history's pending tray). In recent years, relations between the Socialist and Communist Parties have been acrimonious: the Communists accused the Socialists of reneging on essential aspects of the Common Programme and the Socialists accused the Communists of sabotaging the alliance, as they found it was bringing too much electoral benefit to Mitterrand's revamped party.

In the recent election campaign, the credibility of the Left as a potential governing coalition cannot have been reinforced by these mutual recriminations. But, despite those recriminations, the Communist Party has never renounced the perspective of an eventual agreement with the Socialist Party as the necessary means of transforming French society. And a majority has remained in the Socialist Party (whatever increasing temptations some leading members may have felt to do a deal with the Right) for the principle of a united Left; albeit, in Mitterrand's eyes certainly, a Left in which the Socialists would be the dominant party.

Giscard d'Estaing's defeat must be seen primarily in terms of the rejection of his personal haughty rule and his blatant championing of the interests of big captial, rather than in terms of any recent demonstration by the Left of its ability to govern. In this respect, Giscard probably lost more votes as a result of the 100,000 extra people thrown out of work this year than he did because of his dubious relationship with ex-Emperor Bokassa, that well-known donor of diamonds to people in top places.

During the long pre-election campaign, the Communist Party vehemently criticised Mitterrand for what it described as the 'wooliness' (*le flou*) of his proposals and for his refusal to say he would have Communist Ministers in his Government. It is a fact that he has campaigned leaving a lot of options

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open and that the comprehensive and itemised programme the Communists were pressing for when the Union of the Left broke down did not figure in the Mitterrand manifesto. It is true also that Mitterrand is not concerned, in the way the Communists are, to involve extra-parliamentary action in the process of changing society. Nevertheless, the Mitterrand proposals represent the most radical government programme since 1946 and, if implemented successfully, it could open the way to progressive changes in French society.

Notably, it involves the nationalisation of the remaining private banking sector and the public ownership of nine big companies, along with the steel industry and those parts of the nuclear, armaments and space sectors which are financed from public funds. The Peugot group and water distribution are to be brought under a form of public control through minority shareholdings. Mitterrand also proposes to reflate the economy with a target of 3% growth in the current year. Finance is to be pumped into consumption via income tax reductions for the lower paid. Industry is to be stimulated by a programme of public and private investment, particularly in building and public works, and Mitterrand proposes to create 210,000 new jobs.

Much of the expenditure on the proposed growth programme is to be financed from borrowings, although there are plans to increase taxes on higher incomes and introduce a wealth tax (to the disgruntlement of an upper class that is perhaps more adept at tax evasion than any other in Western Europe).

Mitterrand has promised an increase in the minimum wage to £75 a week, increases in pensions and a reduction in the pensionable age to 60, and the opening of negotiations for the introduction of a 35 hour week. And he proposes a temporary price freeze. The 35 hour week (which the Communists say should be imposed by statute) is a crucial factor in the fight against unemployment. The main trade union confederations will press hard for it, while at the same time calling on trade union movements in other Common Market countries to pursue the same aim.

While the Constitution of the Fifth Republic (designed by General de Gaulle to keep the main powers within his own hands) allows the President to make important decisions by decree, Mitterrand could not implement his whole programme with a hostile National Assembly.

The parliamentary elections the new President is calling this month will be used by the Right — with the Reaganesque Jacques Chirac presenting himself as its dominant leader, following the ignominious defeat of Giscard — to try to hold on to an important blocking mechanism. They will also be used by many, including leading Socialist Party politicians, to try to reduce the strength of the Communist Party.

The presidential election campaign and its aftermath faces the Communist Party with some serious questions. In the first round of the election, its candidate, Georges Marchais, obtained 15% of the votes — compared with the 20% achieved by it in recent national elections and the 21% obtained by Jacques Duclos when he was presidential candidate in 1969. The April 1981 percentage of the poll was the lowest for the French Communist Party in any national election since 1936.

The party leadership has argued that the quarter of the Communist electorate that was missing this spring does not indicate a falling away of support for the party's policies. What happened, the leadership said, was that many Communist voters decided to back Mitterrand in the first round, as they knew they would want to back him in the second; they were responding to the fear that, if the Left's votes were too dispersed, there could be no Left candidate to challenge Giscard in the run-off.

Certainly, the media presented the election — as Mitterrand and Giscard did themselves — as a contest between two gladiators, and the pressure on Left voters to 'vote usefully' was very great. But the decision of hundreds of thousands of hitherto Communist voters to choose Mitterrand in the first round, and then the Communist Party's decision to back him unconditionally in the second round, indicates a different appreciation of the Socialist Party's role from that made by Georges Marchais only last September ('If Mitterrand was in the Elysée Palace, he would implement the same policies as Giscard').

François Mitterrand would not be the President of France today if he had not obtained the four and a half million votes that went to the Communist candidate in the first round. And the Left will not have a majority in the National Assembly shortly to be elected if the Communists and Socialists do not have some electoral agreement. Attempts are being made to arrive at a 'contract of Government' between the parties of the new presidential majority. This will not be easy; there are important disagreements between the Socialist and Communist Parties, in foreign policy and with regard to the Common Market as well as in domestic affairs.

But the political realities of France in 1981 require left unity if real advances are to be made by the working people, and if the Socialist Party is not to be pulled back into the seductive arms of the Right. Many activists in the Communist Party have openly criticised their leadership in recent years for what they have seen as its sectarian approaches. Few of those critics would wish to see a weakened Communist Party, which remains the main political defender of working people's interests in France.

SCARLET OR BLUE?

The County Council elections are over and the consensus of most commentators seems to be that — with the possible exception of a performance in London that was less impressive than many had expected — Labour has done very well and, on the basis of their success, should be a shoo-in in a forthcoming general election? How justified is this interpretation? How well do Labour's results compare with those of May 1979's general election, which are a more realistic basis of comparison than are those of the previous set of County Council and GLC elections in May 1977? It will doubtless be recalled that Labour's performance in that year was so appalling that an improvement this year was almost inevitable; in the parlance favoured in American politics to describe electoral disaster, in 1977 Labour 'lost dog-catcher'.

The source of the Labour government's midterm lack of popularity had been its failure to control inflation and the cost of living. In the middle period of the last Labour government's office living standards declined absolutely, a decline that coincided with the deepest unpopularity of the Callaghan government. When the rate of wage increases began to exceed that of the cost of living, the popularity of the Labour government improved, despite the fact that the rate of

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unemployment advanced more or less steadily upward during the 1974-79 period. In fact, opinion poll data collected between these dates showed that the public was usually much more concerned about the cost of living than it was about unemployment. It became something of a cliché among political commentators at the time that increases in the rate of unemployment were not a source of government unpopularity because, even if the rate increased, most voters were not themselves unemployed and had no real fear of becoming so. An extension of this argument was that, in any case, the employed had little sympathy for the unemployed, often suspecting the latter of being 'work-shy'.

Whatever the facts on the matter in the past, this seems no longer to be true and the change is one that ought to be beneficial to Labour. A mid April poll revealed that 72% of the electorate felt unemployment to be the most important problem facing the country today; only 11% of those sampled mentioned the cost of living in this respect. Moreover, as many as 71% of these interviewed felt that the Government was not handling the economy properly; 17% thought the opposite and 11% did not know. Only 24% of the electorate approved of the general performance of the Government and a slightly higher figure of 30% were satisfied with the job Mrs Thatcher was doing as Prime Minister. Did Labour's electoral performance in May this year really measure up to the expectations to be derived from this political situation?

The answer concerning London must surely be a negative one. True, Labour won the Council but they certainly cut it rather fine. The Tories had a majority of 36 in 1977 when they won during the Labour government's period of unpopularity. Labour could manage one of only eight. The next general election will almost certainly be fought in London on a reduced number of constituencies with different boundaries but the outcome over the whole of London of a general election fought on present boundaries (which undoubtedly favour Labour marginally) is unlikely to be very salutary. On the basis of the two-party swing from May 1979 to the recent GLC contests, Labour would win back only eight of the nine London seats won in October 1974 and lost by May 1979 (Woolwich West and Ilford North were lost in by-elections and not regained in May 1979). In addition, Labour might gain Hornsey but it would lose Norwood if the exceptional swing against Ted Knight in the GLC contest were to be repeated.

The net outcome in London might be a return to something worse than the October 1974 situation and, if the anticipated redistricting of present constituencies in London has taken place, Labour would be further disadvantaged. Moreover, some of the recoveries by Labour would be very narrow ones on the basis of the 1979-81 two-party swing in its favour. Ealing North, for example, ought in a general election to return to Labour on a swing of only 1.3%; in the GLC contest the swing to Labour compared with May 1979 was a modest 1.9%. Fulham would revert to Labour on a swing of 1.9%; the 1979-81 figure was 3.4%. In Lambeth, of course, Labour had a particularly difficult campaign, hurt by the media's attacks on Ted Knight in Norwood, a ratepayers' revolt concentrated in the south of the Borough and the intervention of 'spoiler' Social Democratic Alliance candidates in Lambeth Central, Norwood and Streatham. The 1979-81 two-party swing against Labour was 10% in Norwood and 7% in Streatham, the Vauxhall figure of 3% to Labour was well below the inner London average, and the pro-Labour swing of only 1% in Lambeth Central was one of the lowest among seats where the Labour vote was not being simultaneously squeezed by a successful Liberal campaign, as was the case in Croydon South, for example. Indeed, if the swing against Labour in Norwood were to be repeated Borough-wide in next year's Lambeth Council elections, the outcome in terms of seats would be something like a dead heat between Labour and the Tories.

There are a number of disconcerting aspects about the spatial distribution of pro-

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Labour swing since May 1979 throughout Greater London. According to one school of 'swing theorists', measures of absolute percentage swing should be numerically larger — assuming uniform gain — in constituencies where the party favoured by overall swing has less support. Thus, if Party A is in general ascendancy throughout the whole electorate but at the start of the contest has only 20% of the votes in a particular constituency, it has scope to 'convert' among the large residue of 80%. Say, it holds all its earlier vote and then 'converts' a tenth of this 80%; this is 8% of the total electorate, giving Party A a new level of support of 28% of the constituency total and a swing of 8%. The same logic for a starting point of 80% of a constituency electorate would produce an absolute swing to Party A of only 2%. This scenario entirely collapses in the case of the 1981 GLC results. The big pro-Labour swings, while doubtless encouraging to see, were in places where they would be of little use for the purpose of winning seats from the Tories. The safest Labour seats, particularly in the east of London, where Labour suffered large vote losses in 1979 without actually losing (eg, Barking, Dagenham, Stepney & Poplar, and Hackney South & Shoreditch) had 1979-81 swings to Labour that often dramatically exceeded the Greater London average of slightly over 5%. In seats in east London north of the river this swing approached 9%. In places that are to be seen as marginal on the basis of the 1979 results the Labour swing more or less equalled that of Greater London as a whole, whereas Labour's gains were very small in the safer Conservative seats, even those where the Labour vote was not being simultaneously squeezed by a strong Liberal challenge. Clearly, the electorate's response to the unpopularity of the Conservative government is not uniform; instead, the results suggest very considerable class polarisation in present London voting patterns.

Labour therefore looks unlikely on the basis of its recent London performance to manage a working parliamentary majority. What chance then is there that it can more than recover from this by making disproportionate gains elsewhere in the country? Despite the devastating nature of Labour wins in some of the County Council contests, the gains in support relative to 1979 are not always sufficient to justify total optimism. Some of the highest pro-Labour swings relative to May 1979 were, as in London, in seats held by Labour in 1979. The three Manchester constituencies of Ardwick, Blackley and Central, for example, had swings of 9 to 10%. In the east and west Midlands swings were also quite substantial in many Labour-held seats; eg, around 7% in the two West Bromwich seats (complicated by Liberal successes in the East constituency) and 6 to 7% in the three Leicester seats. However, the results were not always so encouraging in those constituencies that Labour would want to win back to attain any sort of majority or in those safer Tory ones that it would also want in order to have a good working majority. Thus, Labour would certainly win back Birmingham Northfield and Yardley as well as, though less comfortably, Selly Oak (all lost in the May 1979 trauma). However, on the basis of the County Council results, Labour would not regain Audrey Wise's former seat of Coventry South-West. Among the safer Tory seats in the Birmingham area Labour would be a long way from winning Hall Green (which would require a two-party swing of slightly over 10%). Manchester Withington, needing a swing of less than 5% for a Labour win, looks a far from certain gain on the basis of the County Council results.

A few, though only a few, of Labour's poorer performances can be laid at the door of interventions by a variety of 'Social Democratic' candidates, even if they were supposedly not 'real' Social Democrats with the imprimatur of the Jenkins-Owen-Rodgers-Williams cabal. The Social Democratic Alliance, for example, won 10.6% in Lambeth Central, 15.0% in Norwood and 14.9% in Lambeth Vauxhall, all contests that included Liberal candidates who were well beaten into fourth place. The general success of Social Democratic candidacies is more difficult to gauge: the winning of a seat on East Sussex Council by a well-known personality in Brighton's Hanover ward was in a no-Liberal contest. There are examples of Social Democratic intervention against the three conventional parties where the upstart achieved some success: 10.6% in Hall Green ward in Birmingham, or 23.2% in Lichfield's Burntwood Chase ward — one a solid Tory seat and the other a Labour gain. Still, recent opinion polling has recorded a substantial decline in hard-core Social Democratic support from the artificially high levels discovered at the time when the new party was launched.

The Communist Party, as far as Greater London is concerned ran sixteen candidates in the ninety-two constituencies. The most successful results were in Southall (2.7%), Hackney Central (3.8%) and Hackney North & Stoke Newington (2.6%). The Southall constituency was not fought in 1977 and in Hackney Central the Communists' percentage in that year was only 1.9%. The Communist candidate fighting the barren terrain of the NF heartland in Hackney South & Shoreditch managed 2.2% of the votes cast. The Communist Party did not fight this constituency in 1977.

On the far Right, the NF and three of its disputatious progeny, the New NF, the Constitutional Movement and the British Democratic Party, ran various candidates — in some cases, as in several London contests, against each other. In general, their support was small, but the NF still managed over 1,000 votes (6.3% of those cast) in Newham South and in The Abbey ward in Leicester, a long-time NF stamping ground, the two-candidate BDP slate including Reed-Herbert averaged over 6%.

What must surely come from the results as far as Labour is concerned is the party's continuing 'image problem' among much of the electorate, of which the Norwood result was only the most conspicuous demonstration. The fact remains that, given the Tories' unpopularity and the electorate's general disapproval of the Government, Labour ought to have done rather better. The 'running-in' period of Michael Foot's leadership is now past, but only 21% of the electorate in mid-April were satisfied with his performance as Leader of the Opposition, a smaller figure in fact than approved of Margaret Thatcher's performance as Prime Minister. On the other hand, 60% felt David Steel to be doing a good job as Liberal leader. Further testimony to the power of the media to shape the electorate's perceptions of the political parties is that 87% saw the Labour Party as 'divided' but — despite months of comment and discussion in the more informative sections of the press about Cabinet splits, 'wets', possible 'U-turns', and so on — only 48% thought this of the Conservative Party. If the Tories' lack of popularity continues to deepen, Labour should reap future electoral dividends. However, if — as is not unlikely — the mid-term trough of the unpopularity of this Government has been reached or has bottomed out, Labour will be in trouble. An unpopular government still has a number of options to restore itself to some semblance of favour and, even if Mrs Thatcher is stalwart enough to adhere to her policies to the point of political perdition, large sections of the Tory Party may not share her single-mindedness. A U-turn, a modest reflation of the economy by the Government or, if Mrs Thatcher shows herself unwilling to move in this direction, a judicious leadership coup in favour of a Macmillian-style Tory, could still see the Tories returned at the next general election.

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Tony Bunyan

The Growing Power of the Military

More than seven years have passed since the first joint army-police operation was carried out in January 1974 when Heathrow airport was occupied. It was to be the first of many such exercises based on alleged terrorist threats. Some commentators put the exercises into perspective. It was, reported the *Guardian*, 'basically a public relations exercise to accustom the public to the reality of troops deploying through the high street' (8.1.74). Three years later, in the winter of 1977/78, twenty thousand troops were used, for the first time in British history, to replace an entire workforce of 32,000 firemen and to break the strike. By this time the public, whatever the 'legal niceties' (to use Sir Robert Mark's term), were indeed accustomed to seeing troops on the high streets of Britain. Although we have not yet seen troops used in a public order situation there is no question that they are ready and prepared to undertake this role too — and if the events over the weekend of April 11/12 during the Brixton 'riots' had become prolonged, and extended to other areas of London, there is little doubt (and some evidence) that the troops would have been called in (*Time Out*, 17.4.81).

The use of troops in civil society in strikes, to combat terrorism and to control public order is now perceived by those in power as a legitimate role for the armed forces and their deployment in these situations forms an essential part of the state's contingency planning for peacetime emergencies. This development in the 1970s contrasts sharply to the tradition, established during the nineteenth century, that the use of troops in civil situations should be strictly limited, subject to civilian control, and only employed in the last resort. During the course of the last century responsibility for maintaining public order (dealing with demonstrations and pickets in particular) passed from the army to the unarmed modern police forces. Thus the re-introduction of the army as one of the agencies for maintaining state control poses major political and constitutional questions which, so far, have not been recognised or challenged by the labour movement.

This article looks at the political and constitutional questions raised by the reinvolvement of the military in an internal role. In particular, it highlights the lack of democratic control over their use, and the new state machinery which has been created to deal with terrorism, strikes and public order.

The constitutional position

The popular assumption since the 1688 Bill of Rights has been that the exercise of physical force by the armed forces of the state is subject to democratic control. Attempts by Charles II and James II to maintain their own armies led to the 1688 declaration which remains important today 'because it asserts that the armed forces are constitutionally subordinate to parliament' (*Constitutional and Administrative Law*, 9th edition, A W Bradley, 1977).

After a series of running battles in the late ninteenth century between Queen Victoria, who appointed the Commander-in-Chief of the army, and the government, control over the army was formally vested in the Army Council which was created in 1904. This consisted of seven members — four military and three civilian with the Secretary of State for War answerable to parliament for everything connected with the army. In 1964 when the three wings of the armed forces were merged under the Ministry of Defence the controlling body became the Defence Council. Today the 13-man Defence Council is comprised of five members of the government, including the Secretary of State for Defence (who is its chairman); the five most senior military officers; and three senior civil servants. It should be noted that on both the old Army Council and the present Defence Council governmental representation is in the minority, and state servants in the majority.

Taken at face value the constitutional position remains today as it did in 1688. The Secretary of State for Defence is answerable to parliament, the day-to-day running of the military is overseen by the Defence Council, and members of the armed forces are only nominally under the command of the monarch.

The reality is somewhat different. As in many areas of the constitution the power of the 'royal prerogative' (the ancient power of the monarch to make law) and the precedents set in common law stand as the law of the land unless statutes have been passed by parliament which automatically override the two former sources of authority. This duality, between parliament and the monarch, is particularly relevant on the question of control over the military where the Secretary of State for Defence, and the Defence Council, exercise powers derived from the monarchial royal prerogative. At the same time common law restraints on the use of troops in civil society, established during the nineteenth century, have been ignored in the developments of the past decade. The starting point therefore is to examine the statutory and common law limits placed on the use of troops in peacetime situations.

The Emergency Powers Acts

There are two Acts of Parliament which authorise the use of troops in strikes and other civil emergencies. The main Act is the 1920 Emergency Powers Act. The origin of this Act was the Defence of the Realm Act (popularly known as DORA), which was passed within days of the outbreak of war in 1914, and gave the government powers to make Regulations for 'securing the public safety and the defence of the realm'. DORA was due to expire when hostilities were officially declared to have ended in 1921, but faced with widespread industrial unrest the government and various state agencies were keen to retain the key powers afforded by DORA for more permanent use. The Act was to 'make exceptional provisions for the protection of the community in case of emergency'. In particular it gave the government power in cases of major strikes or civil disorders to ask the

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monarch to declare a 'state of emergency' where the disruption of the 'supply and distribution of food, water, fuel or light, or the means of locomotion' would deprive the community of the 'essentials of life'. The government is then empowered to draw up Regulations and can 'assume such powers and duties as His Majesty may deem necessary' to restore order and maintain supplies. Once drawn up the Regulations have to be passed by parliament and renewed by them each month. Although the Act enables the government to suspend or amend all laws some restrictions were laid down. No Regulation can introduce compulsory military service or industrial conscription — this requires the declaration of a state of war; it cannot be made an offence to take part in a strike; and existing criminal procedures cannot be altered.

While the powers granted under the 1920 Act are far-reaching they were intended to specify the terms under which troops could be used in strikes and other emergencies, and placed some basic safeguards both on the rights of the subject and by providing for parliamentary scrutiny. Since 1920 there have been 12 declarations of a state of emergency under the 1920 Act, although troops have actually only been used on seven occasions and the wide powers granted under Regulations have never been fully used. The 12 declarations were: 1921 miners' strike; 1924 bus and tram strike in London; 1926 General Strike; 1948 and 1949 dock strikes; 1955 rail strike; 1966 seamen's strike; 1970 dock strike (July), electricity strike (December); 1972 miners' strike (February), dock strike (August); 1973/4 miners' strike. It was the practice until recently of governments of both parties, that the use of troops in strikes on a national basis would require the declaration of a state of emergency under the 1920 Act.

The second statute is the 1964 Emergency Powers Act which was passed in February by parliament in the dying days of Sir Alec Douglas-Home's brief period as Tory Prime Minister. There was only a short debate on the second reading and no amendments were made at the committee stage. To all intents and purposes it was uncontentious. The Tory Home Secretary Henry Brooke told the Commons that he was introducing the Bill because of the 'prolonged bad weather of last winter', the main intent being to make permanent an unrepealed wartime Regulation which had been used by governments of both parties. The purpose, he said, of Section 2 of the Bill, was to legalise the use of troops in tasks which could not be 'properly described as military duties', and cited instances where troops had been used under the Regulation — bringing in the harvest, flood disasters, heath fires and in conditions of severe snow and ice. Section 2 empowered the Defence Council to authorise the use of troops in 'agricultural work or in other work of national importance' (phraseology taken from the wartime Regulation).

Between 1964 and 1977 Section 2 of the 1964 Act was used on three occasions in what were termed as 'limited' and 'local' situations — the 1970 dustmen's strike in Tower Hamlets; the 1973 firemen's strike in Glasgow and the 1975 dustmen's strike also in Glasgow.

How power passed from local control

Common law restraints were embraced in military law. The actions of the military are subject both to the law of the land and, through the Queen's Regulations for the Army, to military law. Queen's Regulations are issued under the 'royal prerogative' by the monarch on behalf of the Defence Council, and are based on various Acts of Parliament and common law precedents (based on laws and customs declared to be law in the Courts). In the postwar period there have been three editions of the Regulations issued, in 1955, 1961 and 1975. In the first two all the constitutional precedents established since the last century were maintained. But the 1975 edition contained several major changes.

Since the beginning of the nineteenth century it was established in common law and included in Army Regulations that the 'civil authority' empowered to call for the aid of troops was: the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police in London (who was a justice of the peace from 1829 to 1974); and outside of the capital, a magistrate or more usually the elected mayor (who was automatically a JP by virtue of the office). The mayors or magistrates were thus empowered to request aid from the local army commander if disorder occurred. This definition of the 'civil authority' was included in Queen's Regulations issued in 1955 and 1961.

In 1976 it emerged that the 'civil authority' had been redefined as the local Chief Constable instead of the democratically-elected mayors (Letter from MOD to secretary of the Cobden Trust, 12.4.76). And secondly that the power to request the despatch of troops was now centrally controlled by the Home Secretary, to whom Chief Constables would apply (Hansard, 8.4.76). In fact, this change had happened without any reference to parliament by means of an amendment to Queen's Regulations for the Army in September 1973 — just three months before the second confrontation between the Heath government and the miners — and was incorporated in the 1975 edition of the Regulations.

The second major change occurred *after* the firemens' strike in the winter of 1977/78. The post-1974 Labour governments (under both Wilson and Callaghan) were known to be reluctant to declare a state of emergency under the 1920 Act — Heath having declared five of the 12 declarations in just four years. Faced with a national firemens' strike the Cabinet (or more precisely the inner Cabinet of key Ministers) decided, on the advice of their civil servants, to authorise the use of troops under S.2 of the 1964 Emergency Powers Act. This fact received no publicity at the time of the strike and was revealed only in February 1978 after detailed investigations (see *State Research Bulletins* Nos. 4 and 5).

Despite the continuing threat of nuclear war, the main 'enemy' perceived by the state is not external but internal

So yet another change was effected in Queen's Regulations. Queen's Regulations were at the time of the firemens' strike quite clear on the procedure to be followed. The relevant Regulation, under the heading 'Military Aid to Civil Ministries', specified, in line with the existing statutes, two situations. The first was where a state of emergency was proclaimed under the 1920 Act in a 'situation where the supply and distribution of the essentials of life to the community are extensively threatened' (Reg J11.004a). The second 'where there is *no proclamation* and the emergency is *limited* and *local*, the Defence Council may, under the Emergency Powers Act 1964, authorise Service personnel to be temporarily employed on work which the Council have approved as being urgent work of national importance' (Reg J11.004b).

The use of troops in the firemens' strike was clearly *national* and *extensive*, not *limited* and *local*. The Ministry of Defence admitted the probable unconstitutionality of their actions and announced that the Defence Council would at its next meeting issue a Defence Council Instruction (DCI) changing the Regulations by simply deleting the words 'limited' and 'local' from Reg J11.004b. The deletion of the offending words removed the contradiction from Queen's Regulations and thus that of issuing potentially unlawful orders to troops, and, *post hoc*, legitimised the use of troops in the firemen's strike.

By-passing parliament

Several issues are raised by these actions. The use of the 1964

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Emergency Powers Act rather than the 1920 Act in the firemens' strike was a clear abuse of the intention of parliament in passing the two Acts. In doing so it set the precedent of using troops on a national scale in strikes without providing for parliamentary sanction or scrutiny. Moreover, the fact that the Queen's Regulations for the Army have now been changed does not dispose of the constitutional contradiction with common law precedents which allow for local democratic control.

This situation is compounded by the powers exercised by the Defence Council under the 1964 Act. A Defence Council 'order' (as distinct from Instruction which changes Army Regulations) is in effect an 'order-in-council'. However, there are two kinds of order-in-council. One derives from *statutory* powers granted by parliament in an Act giving a Minister powers to issue orders-in-council which he first *has to 'lay before parliament'* and these are, theoretically at least, open to challenge. The other derives from the 'royal prerogative' power to issue an order-in-council exercised by, in this case, the Defence Council, which does *not have to be laid before parliament*. In the latter case three members of the Defence Council are able to meet and issue an order-in-council under the 'prerogative' powers which is passed to the Privy Council. Three members of the Privy Council, which numbers several hundred, have to agree it whereupon it is passed to the Queen for signature. Parliament is simply by-passed. It is precisely this latter procedure which is used under the 1964 Emergency Powers Act.

Who to take on and who not to

The implications of these changes over control of the army are best illustrated by looking at their use, or otherwise, in recent strikes.

The decision to use troops in strikes is taken at the highest level, in the Cabinet Office. The general policy is decided by the Civil Contingencies Committee, chaired by the Home Secretary, and the Civil Contingencies Unit, under a senior civil servant, handles matters on a day-to-day basis. Both of these bodies grew out of the major reorganisations after the 1972 miners' strike which involved all levels of government and the civil service. The job of the CCU is to advise the Committee on the likely effect and success of any threatened strike in the public and private sectors. Special Branch, MI5, Defence Intelligence and the relevant Ministries all provide reports on which these assessments are made. Governments of both parties have been particularly concerned when a strike is threatened in key industries where the life of the community could be seriously disrupted.

A list of sixteen public services was drawn up six years ago which placed public service industries in three categories of vulnerability, although experience has led to some amendments. The categories are: a) sewerage, water, electricity, gas and the health service, being the most vulnerable; b) railways, docks, coal production, and refuse collection in the intermediate group; and c) other public transport, education, telephones, air transport and steel in the least vulnerable. Even before coming to power Mrs Thatcher was given a confidential report drawn up by Lord Carrington which concluded that where industries 'have the nation by the jugular vein the only feasible option is to pay up' (*Economist*, 27.5.78).

Despite reassuring statements by government ministers, usually widely reported in the media, the ability of any government to use troops (backed by the police) to replace and outlast striking workers is quite limited. For example during the road haulage drivers' strike in 1978-79 the Labour Home Secretary admitted in the Commons that the introduction of troops was not the answer because the army could move less than 5% of supplies. The road haulage industry, after the strike, was added to category (a), the most vulnerable sector.

A more blatant example occurred last winter when a national water workers, strike was threatened. Conflicting stories as to the ability of troops to cope with the strike abounded. Even the *Guardian* carried an article headlined 'Troops would keep water running in national strike' (7.1.81). Nothing could have been further from the truth. The 'massive use of the armed forces', comprising of 15,000 men (every member of the services not engaged in Northern Ireland and NATO) would have achieved little. According to the best estimate, within 48 hours of the strike starting health hazards would have arisen and many industries been brought to a halt. Without the help of the supervisory staff the Royal Engineers had only enough pumps to keep one city's water system going. A declaration of a state of emergency would have been inevitable and widespread public panic and disorder highly likely.

Policing the recession

So far we have looked at general changes in the control of the use of the military in civil society, which beg major questions of democratic control, and at the use of troops in strikes. However, these aspects represent only part of a much wider rethinking which took place during the 1970s. The turning point was the miners' strike of 1972. Soon after the end of the strike a Brigadier on the General Staff at UK Land Forces Headquarters told *The Times:*

> 'The whole period of the miners' strike made us realise that the present size of the police force is too small. It is based on the fundamental philosophy that we are a law-abiding country, but things have now got to the state where there are not enough resources to deal with the increasing numbers who are not prepared to respect the law' (23.5.72).

This attitude was echoed by the Tory government who announced in March 1973 that a permanent National Security Committee (now the Civil Contingencies Committee in the Cabinet Office) had been set up. What was at issue was not just major strikes but the prospect of mass defiance of the state and the law. Contingency plans to cope with all peacetime emergencies were to be drawn up based on the coordination of the police, military and civil service.

The Special Branch was expanded from some 300 to 1,500 and their brief widened to cover all 'subversive' activities; MI5, the internal undercover agency, was expanded and their regional centres beefed up; para-military units in the police were formed — Special Patrol Groups and Police Support Units — and trained for demonstrations, strikes, and riots; the 'War Plan', first drawn up prior to the First World War, was revamped to cope with the 'internal' enemy; and the new central coordinating unit was created in the Cabinet Office.

The 'internal enemy'

Despite the continuing threat of nuclear war, the main 'enemy' perceived by the state is not external but internal — namely those engaged in political and industrial activity (the 'subversives'). State planning for strikes, widespread public disorder and post-nuclear attack situations are now closely interlinked. Today, the official terms 'Home Defence' (against an external enemy; previously 'Civil Defence') and 'Internal Security' (internal enemy) are used interchangeably. 'Civil Defence' was officially placed in mothballs by the Labour government in 1968, and when the Tories returned to power they did not seek to reverse this policy. Instead the concept of 'Emergency Services' was introduced in 1972, a policy pursued ever since. Wartime emergencies, peacetime emergencies and natural disasters were in future to be considered together. The Home Office circular outlining the new policy stated that:

> 'It is considered that there is much common ground between war planning and the preparations required for and the organisation appropriate to a major peacetime emergency or natural disaster. Accordingly there are many advantages in creating a closer relationship than hitherto in local planning for different emergencies of peace and war' (Home Office circular ES/1/72, dated March 22, 1972).

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Both major parties have used troops to replace striking workers in order to enforce their wage policies

The long-term implications of collapsing the two categories of 'emergency' into one were not lost on those concerned with 'Home Defence' planning. The principal of the Home Defence College (which is under the Home Office, and runs regular training courses on 'Home Defence' for local council officers, councillors and the police), Air Marshal Sir Leslie Mavor, said in relation to 'subversion' and 'sabotage' that 'the full possibility of the present internal threat is only just sinking in' (*Guardian*, 12.6.75). (Earlier this year Sir Leslie Mavor was appointed as the National Co-ordinator of voluntary organisations to help in 'Civil Defence').

While the courses run at the Home Defence College concentrate on disasters, terrorism, and nuclear war, the machinery also has a different potential application. The contradiction is that while elected councillors and local council officials (who are not bound by the Official Secrets Acts) need to be trained for 'Civil Defence' — between 1973 and 1977 over 6,000 such people attended courses there — the involvement of local government in strikes and civil disorders would be highly controversial. For this reason local government officials (as distinct from national state employees) were only marginally involved in the firemen's strike and the road haulage strike. All the facilities, the coordinating centres and communications systems, were provided by the army and the police.

November 1977. A striking fireman watches troops trying to contain a fire.

The military in the 1980s

Contingency planning is effectively based on the colonial model laid out in the British Army Land Manual written in the 1950s. The concept spelt out in the Manual of a controlling 'triumvirate' of: the repressive agencies of the state (the police, the military and the intelligence agencies), the civil service and the government has now been transposed from the Third World to the metropolis. The system for regional (and sub-regional) control for war and peacetime 'emergencies' are now one and the same and each would be under the control of the 'triumvirate'. It is a system geared not just to nuclear war or revolution but one which is adaptable enough to be used in everyday situations — like the firemen's and the road haulage drivers' strikes.

The military are now, in an unprecedented way this century, openly prepared to speak out about the possibilty that they might be used on mainland Britain in a public order role. The BBC 1 series entitled 'War School' on the Army Staff College at Camberley, run by Kitson, included interviews with officers referring to 'subversion' in strikes, broadcasting, and the press. One senior officer said:

> 'The biggest threat we reckon to our sort of society is the communist one and if we think that threat only comprises a great number of tanks sitting on the other side of the Iron Curtain, then we are deluding ourselves' (*Listener*, 10.1.80).

The programme also included a 'mock' exercise based on a revolutionary outbreak in a fictional town in the north of Britain — it was, in fact, based on Aberdeen where a group of nationalists created a situation which the police could not control.

This openness to envisage that the military might be used against the working class of Britain was again illustrated when General Sir Edwin Bramall, the Chief of the General Staff, addressed the Royal Society of Arts on the subject of 'The Place of the British Army in Public Order' last year (6.2.80). While he recognised that the military should only be used as a last resort he also set out the scenario in which the police would have to call on the troops to restore order.

However, the role and influence of the military needs to be put into perspective. Governments of both parties have presided over these developments. Both major parties have used troops to replace striking workers in order to enforce their wage policies. They have also sanctioned the creation of a new, and highly sophisticated, machinery to deal with peacetime 'emergencies' including strikes. Within this new machinery the military, along with the police, the civil service, and the security agencies, are involved at all levels both in planning and regional deployment. The re-introduction of the military into an internal role should be seen less as a sign of military aspirations to find a new post-colonial role but rather as an indication of the degree to which the state, and governments, are prepared to go in order to 'manage' the recession and combat opposition from whatever source it may come.

The implications of developments in this field over the past decade cannot be made too strongly. They not only affect present everyday struggles in relation to wage claims, by the threat or actual use of troops to replace striking workers, but are part of a longer term planning which is intended to pre-empt any revolutionary movement, and could indeed be used against extra-parliamentary support for any truly socialist government, should one come to power. □

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John Kelly

Steel an irreversible decline?

In its Ten Year Development Strategy published in 1973, the British Steel Corporation estimated that in 1980 it would produce 36-38 million tonnes of steel per annum. It actually produced just 11.4 million tonnes, only *one third* of its plan target. In those seven intervening years the industry has been run down at an almost unprecedented rate. Steel plants throughout the country have been closed; over 100,000 steel workers have lost their jobs; steel towns like Shotton and Corby have been devastated; and import penetration in steel has nearly doubled.[1] To this bleak picture must be added the decline of several other major British steel-using industries. Imports of cars, refrigerators, washing machines, radios, cutlery and hand tools have grown dramatically in the 1970s. British shipbuilding, a heavy consumer of steel, is fast disappearing. Housebuilding in the UK is at a virtual standstill. The machine tool industry has all but vanished.

The culmination of the steel industry's decline was the 1980 national steel strike, the first in the industry since 1926, and one of the biggest strikes in Britain for many years. One year later the process of decline is continuing, apparently unabated, and it is this fact which raises a series of vital questions for the labour and progressive movement. What are the causes of the steel industry's decline? Does the British industry differ significantly from other European industries? How has the labour movement responded and why has it apparently been so ineffective? What role did the strike play in slowing down or accelerating industrial decline? What alternatives are available to the labour movement to halt or reverse this process, if any?

THE DECLINE OF THE STEEL INDUSTRY

The major problems of the British steel industry can be traced to a longstanding failure on the part of the old steel capitalists to invest in new plant and equipment and to modernise existing facilities, a problem which they shared with other key industries such as engineering.[2] It was this failure, with its implications for earnings and job security, which led the main steel union, BISAKTA (now the ISTC) to press for nationalisation of the industry. The 1945 Labour government *did* nationalise the industry but it was never made clear how this would assist reorganisation, and this uncertainty of the government was compounded by a massive campaign of resistance on the part of the employers (the British Iron and Steel Federation). The industry was nationalised in 1949, but this measure was suspended by the new Tory government in 1951, and the industry was then denationalised in 1953.[3]

From 1940 onwards the structural weaknesses of the industry — in particular the dispersion of production amongst a large number of small, old and independently owned plants — were masked by a sustained period of buoyant demand during the war, the period of reconstruction, and the postwar boom. Nevertheless the rate of profit *did* decline, from 15% (1956), 14.2% (1960) to 6.1% in 1964, and one response by the steel capitalists was a long overdue increase in capital investment from £93m in 1956 to a peak of £207m in 1961, with a fall off to £77m in 1963. This increased investment in the late 1950s failed to stem the falling rate of profit, or to increase the industry's share of the world market, and in 1967 the majority of the industry (14 large plants) was again taken into public ownership by the Labour government. The primary goal of nationalisation was to socialise the massive costs of the modernisation programme that was required to help the new British Steel Corporation catch up with the technological level of its foreign competitors. Following this rationalisation of the ramshackle private sector, the British steel industry would then, it was hoped, be able to reverse the flow of steel imports and move into export markets.

In the first five years of nationalisation the new Corporation management sought to improve the efficiency of existing plant and to 'shake out' labour. In order to ensure its other objective of providing cheap steel to British industry, both Labour and Tory governments imposed price restraints on the industry and thus held down its profitability. The Ten Year Development Strategy, announced in 1973, envisaged the closure of many small plants, the concentration of steelmaking in five big sites — South Wales, Scotland, Teeside, Sheffield and Scunthorpe — and the expansion of capacity from 27m tonnes to 36m tonnes. The steel unions objected to the proposals and emphasised the importance of providing alternative employment for redundant and displaced steel workers. Indeed for several years the unions were extremely reluctant even to negotiate redundancies. 1972 marked a turning point for BSC in its relations with private industry. Traditionally the nationalised industries have often functioned as sources of cheap raw materials and other necessities for private capital, but in 1972 the Tory government revised the Corporation's statutes and wrote into them a target rate of return on capital of 8%. It also relaxed price restraint and paved the way for BSC to become profitable in its own right.[4]

The pursuit of profitability, however, was hampered both by

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expensive capital investment and other government policies. Many European governments subsidise the coking coal used in steel making to a far greater extent than in the UK, and therefore allow the steel producers to operate at higher rates of profit or to offer lower prices. Energy costs, especially gas, have recently been reported as 40-50% higher in the UK than in many other European countries. Furthermore, BSC's 'losses' are reduced substantially when heavy interest charges are removed, and their actual operating losses are about the average for European producers.

Crude Steel Production (million tonnes)

	1960	1970	1979
UK	24.7	28.3	21.6
West Germany	34.1	45.0	46.0
Italy	8.5	17.3	24.0
USA	90.1	119.3	123.2
Brazil	2.3	5.4	13.8
USSR	65.3	115.9	149.0

Sources: United Kingdom Iron and Steel Statistics Bureau *Monthly Statistics*, Jan 1981, Table 25; *International Steel Statistics Summary Tables*, 1978, pp7-8.

The latest closures

Although plant closures proceeded from 1973 onwards as the Ten Year strategy envisaged, the developing world recession made the expansion of steelmaking capacity look increasingly unrealistic. The Department of Industry issued a revised programme, *The Road to Viability*, in 1978 which inaugurated an acceleration of plant closures and downward revision of capacity in line with falling demand. The chief means of effecting this programme was by cutting jobs: in December 1979 the Chairman, Charles Villiers (an ex-merchant banker) declared that the workforce of 167,000 would have to be cut by the staggering figure of 50,000 and capacity brought down to a little over 15m tonnes.

One year later, with Villiers gone, and MacGregor in his seat, the same policy is being reiterated. By December 1980 the iron and steel workforce had been cut from 152,000 to under 130,000, and MacGregor envisaged a further cut of 20,000 jobs, thus aiming for the Villiers target of 110,000 steel workers. BSC's obsession with jobs, manning levels and labour productivity is strange when one considers that labour costs constitute only one-third of unit production costs, but labour is the element in production that is most directly amenable to managerial control.[5] Steel making capacity however is to fall to 14.4m tonnes, at a time when several European steel industries (eg, Italy, Belgium) are raising capacity, though admittedly other European producers are cutting capacity. There are signs, however, that a further downward adjustment of capacity is now less likely as MacGregor has committed BSC to a more aggressive marketing policy and sales drive, in the way that the main steel union, the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation (ISTC) has advocated.

The Corporation's original programme of expansion was undercut by the world recession which gathered force from 1974, as well as by the rapid growth of steel production in the potential export markets of Asia, Latin America and Africa. But the effects of these processes were particularly severe in the UK for four reasons, some of which have already been cited. First the legacy of an undercapitalised private sector was compounded by price restraint and more recently, by government imposition of profit targets. Second, the transformation of BSC into a *profitable* industry is being taken one step further by the present Tory government. Under the Iron and Steel Bill (1981), BSC is relieved of its requirement to meet British demand for iron and steel through public companies, and the door is now firmly open for privatisation of the most profitable sectors of the Corporation. Third, management itself has committed a number of serious and costly errors, especially through bad investment decisions. Finally, the principal market for BSC's products, namely British manufacturing industry, is being allowed to run down at an alarming rate. Deindustrialisation affects all the advanced capitalist economies as old industries disappear, or jobs increase more rapidly in the service sector. But the *rate* of deindustrialisation in Britain is staggering, and the consequent problems exacerbated by the same lack of home investment that is responsible for the process in the first place.[6]

Although European steel production has recently fallen and world demand is stagnating, the fall in British production is out of all proportion to these trends. In 1978 Britain produced 15% of EEC steel, but 40% of the planned cutback in EEC production in 1980 was to be shouldered by the British industry.

THE TRADE UNION RESPONSE

How have the steel unions responded to these developments and, in particular, BSC's strategy of contraction and redundancy?

The major steel union, the ISTC, organises just over 50% of the iron and steel workforce, with the remaining workers belonging to the National Union of Blastfurnacemen (13,000) and thirteen general and craft unions. The steel unions have always shown a strong willingness to cooperate with steel managers in the technological innovations that have taken place.[7] Average earnings have generally been higher than in the rest of manufacturing industry, and even in the interwar depression they were protected to some degree by a sliding scale linked to profitability and output.

The other principal feature of industrial relations in steel is the history of tension between the ISTC and the craft unions. The ISTC is a single industry union, organising workers whose jobs often require considerable training and skill. The craft unions organise skilled workers and have most of their members outside steel. Over the years craft membership has increased in relation to ISTC process workers as technical advances have called for more maintenance work. The unions bargain separately and have their pay determined in different ways. Although there are areas where union cooperation has been good, other plants have witnessed distant or hostile relations. Not surprisingly, therefore, it is the ISTC, whose fortunes are tied to steel, which has made most of the running in union policies since nationalisation.

The continuation of their 'cooperative attitude' was noted only recently by the union's general secretary, Bill Sirs: '. . . we have never ignored the problems of our industry. The records show this in our moderate wage settlements since nationalisation, in the long list of

[1] Figures are taken from Iron and Steel Trades Confederation *New Deal For Steel* London 1980; Dept of Trade and Industry *Steel: Ten Year Development Strategy* London 1973; M Upham, The British Steel Corporation: Retrospect and Prospect, *Industrial Relations Journal*, Vol 11, July-August 1980.

[2] See K Ovenden *The Politics of Steel*, London 1978; P Bowen *Social Control in Industrial Organisations*, London 1976; E J Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, Penguin 1969.

[3] D McEachern 'Party Government and the Class Interests of Capital: Conflict Over the Steel Industry', *Capital and Class* 8, 1979.

[4] *First Report from the Select Committee on the Nationalised Industries: British Steel Corporation* London 1975.

[5] Many issues of *Steel Workers Banner* produced during the 1980 strike criticised BSC's emphasis on the productivity of labour. See also M Upham *op cit* and T Mainwaring, 'Labour productivity and the crisis at BSC: behind the rhetoric, *Capital and Class* 14 (forthcoming).

[6] See S Aaronovitch, *The Road from Thatcherism: the Alternative Economic Strategy* London 1981.

[7] See P Bowen *op cit*.

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agreed plant closures and the tens of thousands of jobs lost — 40,000 in the last two years — over 100,000 in ten years'.[8]

The rundown of plants and the loss of jobs were obtained on the basis of relatively large redundancy and severance payments, starting at the Clyde Iron Works in 1977. But the rapid succession of closures and higher redundancy payments — at Hartlepool, East Moors, Ebbw Vale, Shelton — generated a growing resistance. The planned closure of Bilston in 1978 provoked a strike threat from the ISTC, that was rapidly withdrawn when the closure notice was cancelled, but it was the planned closure of Corby which ultimately though only indirectly led to the national strike of 1980.

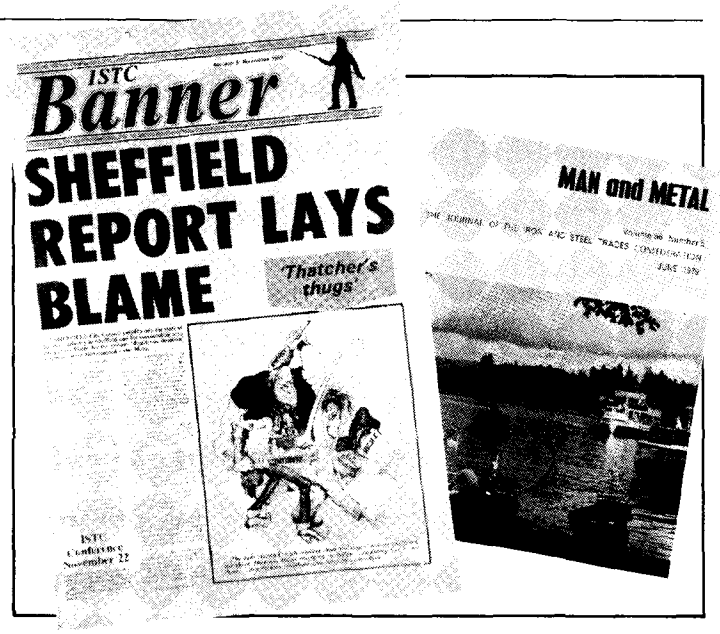
Corby

Corby was a medium sized, fairly modern and efficient works which had not featured in the 1973 closure list. Indeed the 1973 Report stated that 'Corby has an assured long term future as a major tube making plant', not least because it was the main employer in the town.[9] The local well organised resistance finally led the Executive Committee of the ISTC to suspend all joint consultation with BSC and call for a one day strike in November 1979. This historic decision to take serious industrial action on closures signified a much greater degree of unity within the ISTC than had existed for some years. Under the 1973 review the workforce had been quite sharply divided into those who were safe — in the big five sites — and those in the smaller and older plants who were under threat. Once the axe was raised over Corby, the position was transformed because it became clear that neither size nor efficiency was any longer an effective guarantee of survival. That this fear was well founded was borne out only weeks later when Villiers announced that 50,000 jobs would have to go.

Nevertheless until late 1979 the workforce as a whole was unevenly exposed to the threat of closure, and the basis for unity in action was therefore limited. The brunt of job losses had been borne by the ISTC and NUB, whilst the craft, ancillary and white collar workers had suffered rather less.[10] Added to this was the fact that the steel unions had failed to stop a single plant closure (though major redundancies at River Don had been thwarted in 1972), and indeed the record of the labour movement generally in fighting redundancies and closures was far from encouraging. In this context, it was the derisory pay offer of a 2% consolidation of existing earnings with an extra 10% available from local productivity deals that provided the issue which channelled the anger and frustration of steelworkers into a united campaign.

> The emphasis on wages promoted what one would expect — a militant, economistic trade union consciousness

As the World in Action 'Steel Papers'[11] showed, there was certainly collusion between BSC and the government in the lead up to the strike, called by the ISTC on December 7. A few years earlier the Tories, then in opposition, had singled out the steel industry as one where it would be feasible to 'take' a strike if it were necessary.[12] But it would be a mistake to underestimate the simple incompetence of BSC management. They were anxious to tie wages to productivity and saw no way of doing this at national level: hence the emphasis on local productivity deals. However they seriously miscalculated the union's emphasis on the 2% component of the offer, at a time when inflation was 17%, and underestimated the internal strength of the ISTC. Although, having called the strike from January 2, ISTC continued negotiations until Christmas, and some of its leaders seriously thought there would be no strike at all, or that it would be 'short and sharp'. For the ISTC — as a traditionally right wing and relatively undemocratic union — to call a strike at all though was a major breakthrough. The union was founded in 1917 but its first annual conference was not held until *1976*, and even then it was a consultative not an executive gathering. The general secretary, Bill Sirs, shared a platform with the Social Democratic 'gang' at the Labour Party Conference in 1980, supports the right wing 'Campaign for Labour Victory', and recently wrote a strong attack on the Labour Party Wembley Conference decision.[13]



THE STEEL STRIKE

From the start of the strike the ISTC was clear that victory depended on the maintenance of unity, and that unity could be guaranteed only if the strike was fought on the single, and simple, issue of wages. Bill Sirs' insistence on this theme was quite firm: an inset in the first two issues of the strike newspaper *Steelworkers Banner* calling for a halt to the closures, an enquiry into managerial incompetence and an expansion of steel production, as well as a cost of living wage rise, disappeared from subsequent editions. The BSC management was also 'willing' to fight solely on wages in the expectation that subsequent decisions over jobs would be less strongly contested. Finally, though local militants recognised that the strike involved jobs and the industry's future, as well as wages, they believed that a wages victory would strengthen the subsequent struggles on jobs. This coalition of interests on wages did not preclude the articulation of other issues, and the superbly produced weekly strike paper continually hammered home the message that BSC management was incompetent even in its own terms. Their arguments for closing Corby and other plants were challenged; their accounting was called into question; and their claim that British labour productivity was way below that of European steelmakers shown to be largely, if not wholly, spurious. What then were the effects of the thirteen week strike on the unions and on the future of the industry?

The clearest example of the *cumulative* lessons of struggle was provided by the organisation of picketing in South Yorkshire. Drawing on the extensive experience of the miners, South Yorkshire steelworkers very quickly developed an efficient and effective cell system of local pickets, as well as a militant group of flying pickets. The Rotherham and South Yorkshire strike committees which organised and directed picket operations met daily to monitor and review the progress of the strike, again drawing on experience elsewhere.[14]

It was the organisation of flying, secondary pickets which brought the steel unions into contact with other unions, especially the National

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Union of Railwaymen, the AUEW in Sheffield engineering, and the TGWU which organised drivers and dockers. These links have been maintained since the strike, and have been formalised through the Triple Alliance between steelworkers, miners and railwaymen. In view of the traditional isolation of the ISTC, these links undoubtedly constitute one of the most important gains made in the course of the strike.

The second major outcome of the strike is that any lingering faith in the ability or competence of BSC's national management has finally been reduced to zero. The numerous instances of miscalculation, and incorrect and expensive decisions described in *Steelworkers Banner* were all added to several times over in many discussions I had with South Yorkshire steelworkers, and it was clear that the claims of incompetence echoed local experiences. The strike also destroyed any remaining vestiges of credibility possessed by the ex-merchant banker chairman, Charles Villiers, not least because of his obvious collusion with government ministers and his equally transparent denials of it. The union's more aggressive outlook is also symbolised by its retention of the paper *ISTC Banner* in place of its dull and uninspiring predecessor *Man and Metal*.

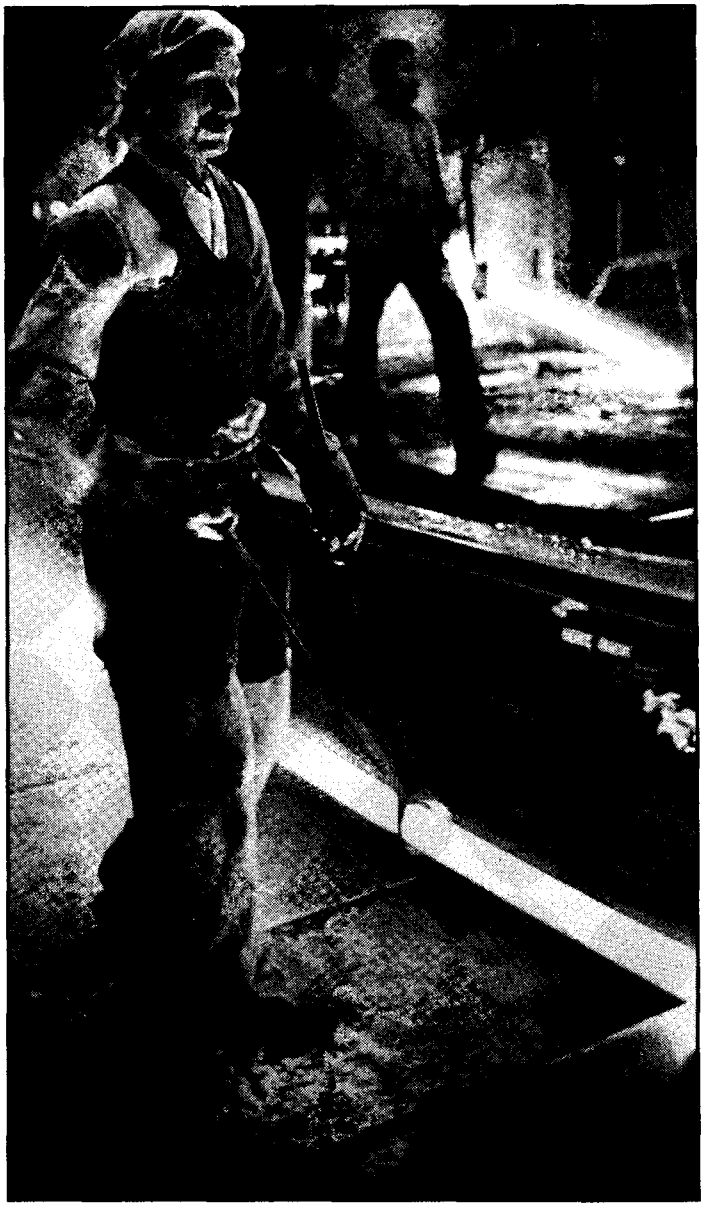
Finally, the strike undoubtedly widened the growing rift between the more militant section, especially South Yorkshire and South Wales[15] and the more conservative sections of the union. Bill Sirs' prevarication over the private steel sector, which was allowed to work during the first 25 days of the strike, provoked the Rotherham strike committee to pass a resolution calling for his resignation, and criticism of the pro-Sirs leadership was intense and almost continuous throughout the thirteen week strike. Yet it would be a gross mistake to conclude that a solid bloc of steelworkers could therefore be mobilised against the current leadership. At the ISTC's one day conference in November 1980 the general secretary's report was reasonably well received and criticism of the leadership was muted and sporadic. This fact alone suggests that the effects of the strike on class consciousness may have been contradictory and uneven, a suggestion that is amply borne out by further evidence.

Despite initial strong feeling, union commitment to the blacking of scab lorries gradually waned, and a meeting called at Northern College on May 26 to discuss the lessons of the strike was attended by only 20 steelworkers. The strong feeling that did remain was largely punitive, and expressed in hostility towards non-striking steelworkers. On the other hand, the threat of redundancy is a reality for many steelworkers and recently brought thousands onto the streets in Scunthorpe.

THE STRIKE AND CONSCIOUSNESS

Taken together these examples show there is no simple relationship between strikes and class consciousness, and from mere participation in a strike we cannot read off a corresponding elevation of consciousness.[16] The reasons for this are fourfold, and the first concerns the *demands* of the strike. The tactical concentration on wages has already been mentioned and was epitomised in the slogan '20% — no strings' which was coined in South Yorkshire and widely taken up. The emphasis on wages promoted what one would expect — a militant, economistic trade union consciousness which does not necessarily (and in practice has not) generalised into a more comprehensive, political consciousness. The political consciousness does not emerge directly from the experience of struggle, but rather such experiences have to be *interpreted* by local and national *leaderships*.

The ideological role of leadership — the second factor in the strike — is well illustrated by reference to the mass picketing organised at private steel firms and docks in February. These pickets were



frequently broken up by violent police tactics involving snatch squads and arbitrary arrests, and pickets naturally defended themselves against this harassment. On the day following one of these pickets, the Rotherham strike committee discussed the events, and whilst several interpretations were put forward, the dominant interpretation

[8] *Man and Metal* Dec 1979.

[9] *Steel: Ten Year Development Strategy*, *op cit*, para 58. Steelmaking (as distinct from tube-making) was to continue for 'at least' the rest of the decade with a final decision to be made in the mid 1970s. On resistance to the Corby closure, see B Rowthorn 'Corby and the steel crisis', *Marxism Today* Dec 1979.

[10] See M Upham, 1980, *op cit*.

[11] Excerpts were printed in *Steelworkers Banner* Number 7, Feb 1980.

[12] This position appeared in the notorious *Ridley Report*.

[13] *ISTC Banner*, Feb 1981.

[14] See for instance the excellent book by Malcolm Pitt, *The World on Our Backs: Kent Miners and the 1972 Strike* London 1978.

[15] ISTC militants had unsuccessfully attempted a few years earlier to introduce mild democratic reforms into the union's election methods. See *Steel Workers and Reform*, published by the Liaison Committee for Constitutional Reform (ISTC) 1979.

[16] See also E J Hobsbawm 'The Forward March of Labour Halted?' *Marxism Today* Sept 1978.

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focused on the class nature and role of the police and the lengths to which they were prepared to go in order to defend private property. A few days later a similarly violent mass picket on the East Coast was discussed at the Scunthorpe strike committee. The dominant view there (and again there were minority views) was that in any organisation you would always find 'a few bad apples' and some police violence was probably inevitable, though obviously reprehensible. In one case then, the dominant view was a *class* analysis, but in the other, a personalised explanation was advanced, for the same phenomenon: police violence against pickets.

The third factor linking strike participation and consciousness is the *organisation* of the strike, and especially of picketing, at local level. Discussion of picketing is often focused on its more sensational aspects, usually violence, and the celebration of picketing by the ultra left often mirrors the proclivities of Fleet Street journalists in search of a story, and of Tory reactionaries eager to curb trade union power. Undoubtedly some of the steel picketing was violent, and very often this was defensive and wholly justified. At the same time, even the official South Yorkshire police report on the strike goes so far as to say that 'it must be accepted that during the majority of the time there was no confrontation between the police and pickets and relationships were extremely good'.[17] Much of the local picketing in South Yorkshire was in fact both quiet and peaceful, and although the success rate measured by the number of plants shut down or seriously affected, was very uneven, there was undoubtedly an impressive degree of solidarity shown by some haulage drivers.

Local pickets in the Rotherham area were allocated into picket cells controlled by a marshal who was then responsible to the strike committee. After the first few chaotic days of the strike during which picket cells were frequently shifted from one plant to another, most of the cells were assigned to plants where they subsequently remained for the duration of the strike. This orderly distribution of pickets by the strike committee was only possible because of the commitment of the pickets and because of their organisation in a quasi-military command structure. Yet this same structure also served to create a gulf between *some* of the pickets and the local strike leadership. The rank and file pickets often worked a regular system of shifts, and between themselves and the strike committee there stood a hierarchy consisting of a shift leader and the picket marshal. Although many pickets did attend weekly mass meetings to receive progress reports on the strike and on negotiations, many had little direct involvement in the key areas of decision-making.

there is no evidence that the three month strike had more than the most marginal effects on the major steel users

The outcome of the strike

There was then *some* tension between *efficient* organisation and democratic organisation, and whilst this is certainly not inevitable, and during the steel strike was probably not *critical* (not least because of regional variation in organisation) it *does* have consequences for the effects of the strike on class consciousness. In particular it is possible that minimal or routinised involvement in strikes may produce only marginal effects on the strikers themselves.

Finally, of course, the *outcomes* of the strike are possibly the most important factor influencing its effects on class consciousness. Certainly the final steel settlement — an increase on basic rates of 11% plus a productivity bonus of 4.5%[18] — was interpreted in many quarters as a defeat. The Rotherham strike committee faced vocal, if minority, opposition at the local mass meeting held on 2 April to announce the return to work, despite its own insistence that the settlement was unacceptable. Even the EC of the ISTC recorded its 'disappointment' at the settlement, and its negotiating committee recommended acceptance only by 42 votes to 27. Even if this negative assessment was not wholly shared by the membership, no one doubted that a three month strike with loss of earnings was a heavy price to pay for the results obtained. It is probably fair to say that the strike did engender a militant trade union consciousness among a section of the workforce. But one of the ironies of the strike is that working class unity was built up far more significantly *outside* steel than within it. On the one hand, there is the Triple Alliance, and the many local initiatives involving joint committees of dockers, drivers, and other groups. On the other hand, substantial *disunity* remains *within* the industry and was starkly illustrated in response to 'the MacGregor Plan' of December 1980, nine months after the strike. The new chairman planned to reduce Corporation manning to approximately 110,000 from its present 130,000, and to impose a six month pay freeze. Only the ISTC unequivocally opposed both proposals: the GMWU accepted them both saying there was no alternative, and the other steel unions took similar though not identical positions. The result of BSC's ballot showed a large measure of support for the Plan: 63,237 voted for and only 17,900 voted against. But the ISTC ballot showed big majorities against the pay freeze and the job cuts.

COULD IT HAVE BEEN DIFFERENT?

Could the outcome and aftermath of the strike have been different? And what was the role of the national leadership in the course of the strike?

To a large degree the outcome of the strike must be laid at the feet of the national union leaderships if only because at no stage did they apparently sit down and consider precisely what action had to be carried out in order to win the strike. The organisation of the strike within the ISTC for example, was left entirely in the hands of the Divisional leaderships. This strategic omission rested on the fact that BSC produced in 1979 80% of UK steel output, and held 54% of the domestic market. It was therefore easy to think that simply cutting off this production would before too long have dramatic economic effects and would cripple major sections of industry. But the ISTC claims to the contrary notwithstanding, there is no evidence that the three month strike had more than the most marginal effects on the major steel users, and the reasons for this astonishing lack of impact reveal a series of key trends in domestic and international steel production.

The international capitalist recession was hitting several major British steel consumers, notably cars, engineering, shipbuilding and construction. Coupled with this is the fact that privately owned steel stockholders expanded their operations and their stocks considerably in 1979. One of the largest concentrations of private steel stockholders in the UK is the West Midlands, but this is an area where the ISTC has *relatively* few members, and BSC few plants.

Steel imports

It is also clear that despite the massive picketing of ports and harbours, steel imports rose considerably during the strike as the following figures show.

Steel Industry Product Imports[19]

('000 tonnes, monthly averages and figures)

			1980					
1977	*1978*	*1979*	*Jan*	*Feb*	*Mar*	*Apr*	*Aug*	*Sep*
309.9	306.0	315.3	256.4	321.5	346.7	712.9	280.4	296.9

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The four major European sources (in order) were West Germany, France, Belgium and the Netherlands, and these countries alone accounted for 77% of the increase in imports between January and April 1980. The economic consequences of the strike are difficult to disentangle from the effects of the deepening recession, but a spokesman for the private steel producers said towards the end of 1980 that BSC very quickly made up for orders lost during the strike.

Unlike the other major basic industry — coal — also nationalised because of the inability of private capitalists to modernise, steel has only an indirect relation with private, individual consumers. A coal strike can rapidly cut power supplies to millions of people, but the effects of a steel strike have no such immediate effect on the 'public'. In the middle of a major recession, with alternative supplies available and stocks high, winning a steel strike is an altogether more difficult task.

Certainly the ISTC Executive could, and should, have pulled out the private sector workers from the start, and should have developed a strategy aimed at crippling key industries or plants. The ISTC general secretary, Bill Sirs, must accept a large measure of responsibility for these omissions. On the other hand, the dependence of the steel industry on a series of domestic industries that are themselves in decline set crucial limits on what could be accomplished within the boundaries of a single industry.

AN ALTERNATIVE STRATEGY FOR STEEL

This dependence also has implications for an alternative strategy for steel aimed at economic regeneration and job preservation, and points to the need for a strategy that goes beyond the confines of the steel industry itself. After the strike, the ISTC did actually produce an 'alternative strategy' entitled *New Deal For Steel*. Sirs however, remained lukewarm on the need for a campaign around this alternative, because *New Deal* was essentially a union business proposal and not a mobilising document. As he himself wrote in the preface: 'Our alternative strategy is to cut costs by a number of much needed and sensible savings. This would allow BSC to cut its prices as part of a totally re-thought aggressive commercial policy. Within this policy would be a strong export drive, improved quality of steel and flexible responses by BSC to market demand'.

That indeed is an apt summary of the *New Deal*, and its modesty is underlined by the qualified support it has received from the new chairman of the Corporation, and the fact that several of its recommendations — a cut in prices, debt write-offs and an export drive — have been accepted by BSC.

It is certainly the case that BSC exports have been concentrated in slowly expanding markets, such as the EEC, rather than in less developed countries, a fact that has been used to support *New Deal For Steel*'s 'aggressive marketing' policy. But it is also true that BSC has always functioned primarily to service British capital and has sold most of its steel domestically. The continuing deindustrialisation of Britain is a problem that could far outweigh the potential gains from possible overseas markets.

To some extent *New Deal For Steel* is a limited extension of the cooperative posture long taken by the steel unions, and it is this traditional position which has yet to be replaced by a viable alternative. BSC has enjoyed considerable success in undermining opposition to closures and job losses by paying out large sums of redundancy money. One sign of ISTC's current confusion and weakness was clearly revealed at its one day National Consultative Conference, held on November 22 last year. Bill Sirs cited cases of closure where he had been willing to fight but local acceptance of redundancy pay had prevented him from doing so. Indeed steelworkers at Port Talbot recently signed a redundancy agreement

before informing union head office. But it is also true that several delegates made the opposite point, charging the national leadership with failure to lead and organise a fightback that could gather local support.

What kind of alternative?

The aim of an alternative strategy for steel cannot be confined to an economic regeneration of a single industry, as the ISTC's *New Deal For Steel* suggests. The industry is so closely tied to domestic steel users that any attempt to expand steel production without also expanding these other, user industries is bound to fail. And if the alternative strategy of the Left is to transform social relations and involve people in struggle it cannot exist merely as a set of economic demands drafted at national level. [20]

The national character of the alternative economic strategy is well suited to an industry such as steel which can only be effectively regulated at this level. But at the same time this feature of the industry

[17] South Yorkshire Police *The National Steel Strike 1980*, p11.

[18] The full text of the agreement, with its other conditions, was reprinted in *Steel News*, 10 April 1980.

[19] Figures are taken from *Monthly Steel Statistics*, Iron and Steel Statistics Bureau, Feb, Apr, Sept 1980, Table 22.

[20] See B Rowthorn 'The Politics of the Alternative Economic Strategy', *Marxism Today* Jan 1981.

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sets limits on what can be achieved at local, plant level as the campaigns against plant closures have revealed. Even at Corby, where the steel unions united in the anti-closure struggle, secured the involvement of local community groups and organised a substantial propaganda and publicity campaign, the plant was nevertheless closed. In this respect delegates to the ISTC November 1980 conference were correct to argue for the importance of national leadership in the struggle against the general policy of steel contraction, since this would dramatically raise the probability of defeating the BSC's plans. As one conference delegate pointed out, 'workers will only fight if they believe they can win.'

The major obstacles in the path of effective struggle and democratic planning are the existence of private steel plants and stockholders, and the under development of trade union unity. Although private sector steel making is now suffering from the recession as much as the public sector, and is receiving little direct government assistance, the long term plans of the Government are extremely ominous. Despite a recent massive injection of finance into BSC, coupled with the writing off of a £4500 million debt, the Government has never abandoned its aim of privatisation of the public sector, a fact made abundantly clear in the new Iron and Steel Bill (1981). If the industry is once more broken up into competing private units the goals of planning and trade union unity will recede into the distance, and this is why complete public ownership of all iron and steelmaking, and stockholding plant is essential.[21]

From the standpoint of trade union unity the steel industry shows problems now that are similar to those faced by miners in the past. In a period of economic boom, multiunionism and decentralised bargaining provide considerable opportunities for workers to exploit their bargaining power in order to improve earnings and conditions. Well organised plants can set the pace and provide comparisons to be followed elsewhere. But during economic crisis this fragmentation works to the *dis*advantage not the advantage of the workforce as plants endeavour to protect themselves at the expense of others. Unified bargaining could well overcome some of these difficulties within the industry. Externally, it is impossible to overestimate the importance of local links with trade unions from other industries, especially where those industries are major steel users.

an industrial economy must retain its own steelmaking capacity if it is to avoid dependence on other capitalist powers

Recent experience shows however that economic integration and trade union unity are necessary but not sufficient conditions for the conduct of effective struggle against deindustrialisation. The leadership of the ISTC cannot be relied upon to organise *campaigns* around a radical alternative strategy. But the experience of the strike suggests that the militancy arising from intense class struggle is also insufficient, and that clear, ideological perspectives must be developed by political leaderships within the unions.

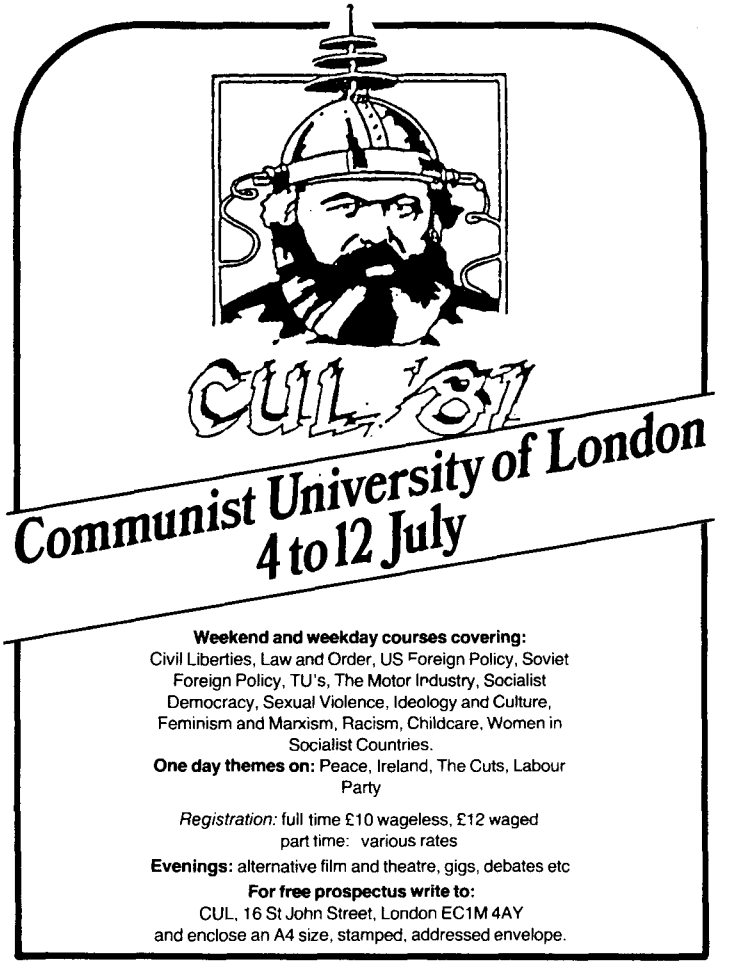
But when a left Labour government is returned to office, what policy ought it to pursue for steel? How far should production be expanded? Is it feasible to retain a steel industry in the light of world expansion of steel production? This last issue was noted in the general secretary's report to the ISTC conference in November 1980, as was the introduction of production quotas on four categories of steel by the EEC Council of Ministers. Yet it was symptomatic of the level of consciousness within the union that not one delegate came forward to speak on these sections of the report. The widespread use of steel throughout manufacturing means that an industrial economy must retain is own steelmaking capacity if it is to avoid dependence on the other capitalist powers who are currently Britain's main trading partners. All the major European steel industries (apart from Belgium) are *national* enterprises producing primarily for domestic markets. Furthermore, by contrast with industries such as textiles, steel feeds into many branches of production. In the context of implementation of an alternative economic strategy by a socialist government, economic dependence on foreign capitalists could prove fatal. In the longer term economic integration of a socialist Western Europe (along the lines of Comecon) may well render steel industries superfluous in particular countries, but until that stage is reached the preservation of manufacturing industry and the maintenance and expansion of living standards requires a national and nationalised steel industry.

Summary

To sum up then, an alternative strategy for steel can be produced only as part of a strategy for simultaneously preserving large sectors of manufacturing industry. But such a strategy should not be seen simply as a set of economic policies, as a technical solution to economic problems, but as a *political* strategy that can mobilise large numbers of people. The multiunionism in steel continues to pose a barrier to the unity needed for such struggles notwithstanding the unity that is being achieved between steel and other workers. Unity within the industry began to emerge from the 1980 strike, but the effects of the strike on organisation and consciousness were complex and fragile and cannot be taken for granted. □

[21] See CPGB, *A Real Future For Steel*, London June 1980.

I would like to acknowledge helpful comments on an earlier draft by Gordon Ashberry, Paul Hudson, Ian Merrilees and Bob Rowthorn.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Rodney Hilton

The English Rising of 1381

It has been remarked that, apart from William Morris's efforts to revive the message of John Ball, the British radical and labour movements have not received into their tradition a memory of the rising of 1381. This year, the 600th anniversary of the rising, there has for the first time been a considerable popular manifestation of interest. The event itself, its context and its consequences are worth considering here.

It was a remarkable episode for the period: A plebeian army, probably badly armed, numbering thousands rather than hundreds, entered the strongly defended capital and, on 13-14 June 1381, took over the principal fortress of the strongest feudal monarchy of 14th century Europe. Most of them came from Essex and Kent, where initially sporadic movements of resistance to the collection of the third poll tax had gained momentum and had acquired a sharpened edge as a result of resistance to special commissions of justices who were sent to punish the rebels. In addition to tax collectors and justices, other royal officials were attacked. The records of manorial courts were burned in large numbers partly, no doubt, because they contained the records of the unfree conditions of tenure of a substantial number of peasants, but more because they symbolised that exercise of 'lordship' by the landowning aristocracy over the tenantry which the rebel leadership attempted to overthrow. It is worth remarking, however, that there was remarkably little violence offered to individual lords, other than those who were royal officials or who were specifically identified with the hated advisers of the young (14 years old) king, Richard II. These targets, together with the attacks on anybody connected with the judicial system, suggest the remarkable level of politicisation, unusual for a mass movement at this period.

The chief victims of rebel violence were executed in London, at the Tower of London, on June 14. These were Simon Sudbury, Archbishop of Canterbury and Thomas Hales, Prior of the order of the Knights Hospitallers. They were not killed because of their religious functions, but because Sudbury, as chancellor was the chief advisor to the Crown and Hales, as Treasurer, was identified with the exaction of taxes. With the help of the London poor and other discontented elements in the city there were other exemplary acts of destruction, such as the hated Duke of Lancaster's Savoy palace on the Strand and the Hospitallers' Priory at Clerkenwell. Lawyers were particular targets of popular dislike, and economic rivalries were expressed in the killing of Flemish weavers and clothmaking entrepreneurs.

Continuing opposition

On 14 June the rebels met the king and his advisors at Mile End and put forward a simple set of demands, the most important of which was the end of servile status and tenure. On the following day, when many rebels had dispersed, believing royal promises of enfranchisement, the remainder, under the leadership of Wat Tyler, put forward supplementary, and more radical demands. This meeting ended with the killing of Tyler by the Lord Mayor of London, and the dispersal of the rebels.

Meanwhile, up to the end of June, in the whole of East Anglia and the Home Counties, attacks on tax collectors, JPs, MPs and royal and estate officials continued. Dartford, Maidstone and Canterbury had been occupied before the entry into London, and some of their inhabitants rallied to the side of the rebels. St Albans, Bury St Edmunds and Cambridge took the rebel side subsequently. Although the central areas of revolt were pacified by the end of July, the example of rebellion was followed as far away as Worcestershire and Cheshire. Existing tensions in towns such as York, Beverley, Bridgwater and Winchester flared up again as the power of central government was seen to falter. Even after the general suppression, village resistance at a local level continued sporadically until 1450 and after. In these local confrontations, peasants demanded and often won important concessions. It could have been that prudent lords as well as defeated rebels heeded the warning expressed in the contemporary jingle:

Man beware and be no fool
Think upon the axe and of the stool
The stool was hard, the axe was sharp
The fourth year of King Richard.

This is not the place to present a detailed account of the rising. What will be attempted will be the location of the rising in the specific conditions of the class structure and dynamic of late medieval feudal society, together with some indication of its place in the progress of human history.

The breadth of social support

The first point to emphasise is that this was not simply a 'peasants' revolt. This impression was given by two of the most influential chroniclers of the time. Thomas Walsingham, monk of St Albans, said that the rebels were 'rustics whom we call serfs or bondmen' and 'not merely rustics but the most abject of rustics'. Jean Froissart, chronicler of the French and English aristocracies at war, began his account of the revolt with a by no means imperceptive analysis of landlord-peasant relationships. But the subsequent indictments of rebels and rebel leaders and the accounts by royal officials of the confiscated goods of those executed or in flight present a somewhat different picture. It is

The death of Wat Tyler, from 'Froissarts Chronicles'.

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clear that rural and urban craftsmen, whether self-employed or wage earners, constituted an important element, as important in the ranks of the rebels as they were in the population as a whole, that is between 10% and 20%. One must also emphasise their leading rôle. Wat Tyler was (so the chroniclers said) indeed a 'tiler'; the Norfolk leader, Geoffrey Litster, as his surname indicates, a dyer.

Nor were the 'rustics' in any way 'abject'. Many of the most active were rich peasant employers of labour, some of them almost small landowners. Indeed, in East Anglia and Kent some discontented gentry took advantage of the rising to pay off scores against their enemies, especially the Duke of Lancaster. Their presence was mainly opportunist however. The general impression is that a wide spectrum of all social classes below the ranks of the nobility, the gentry and the merchant capitalist élites of the big towns (especially London) were either wholehearted or half-willing supporters. One element must be given particular emphasis, namely the parish clergy. Reference is often made to the similarity of the grievances of a 'clerical proletariat' to those of peasants and wage earners. This is demonstrable. But what also needs emphasis is that the numerous clergy who counselled the rebels and entered the active leadership should also be regarded as the medieval equivalent of a radical intelligentsia, bringing to the movement an ideological support which had deep roots in a heretical Christian tradition going back at least to the 11th century.

This realisation of the breadth of the social support for the rebellion has supported analyses which (to quote one example) 'refuse to interpret the great revolt in terms of a crude class struggle'.[1] Some historians, therefore, see it as a forerunner of all-class provincial protests against the encroachments of central government; others, more narrowly, as a collection of individual protests against individual acts of injustice. However, whatever the grievances of craftsmen, journeymen, small free landowners and burgesses, the basic motive force of discontent and action is to be found in the landlord-tenant relationship, which was as much the defining relationship of feudal society, as the capitalist-wage earner relationship is of capitalist society — even though in both cases many elements *seem* to be outside that relationship.

The agrarian society

The economy was primarily agrarian. Probably three quarters of the population were peasants or in closely related occupations — agricultural labourers, village craftsmen. It was from this class of family-based cultivators, rich, middling or poor, producing in the first instance the means of their own subsistence, that the income of the landowning ruling class and the revenue of the state was essentially derived. It came from rents in money and kind, unpaid labour service and profits of private jurisdiction for the landowners; taxes in cash, together with various arbitrary levies on livestock and other produce, for the state. A substantial minority — in some areas a majority — were villeins or serfs. Apart from heavier rent obligations than most free tenants, they were subject to restrictions on the freedom of movement, of marriage and of the sale of certain categories of goods. Heavy death duties had to be paid from their livestock and their heirs paid heavier entry fines than free tenants. The guarantee of all this economic and social exploitation was the exercise by their lords of private jurisdiction through the manorial courts, presided over by the lord's steward. Many lords also had private jurisdictional powers of a policing character together with control over petty trade, which affected free as well as unfree tenants. Private jurisdiction was the prop of landlord power, over the free as well as over the unfree. Hence the burning of the manorial court rolls in 1381.

the basic motive force of discontent and action is to be found in the landlord-tenant relationship

On the other hand, the village economy of the peasants, with its communal rather than individual access to pasture and other natural resources, gave rise to considerable cohesion among the peasants, rich as well as poor. There was a contradictory element even in private jurisdiction. Although the manor court was presided over by the lord's steward, in practice it was run by the head-men of the tithing groups, or jurors, who were normally drawn from the village élite of richer peasants. It was they who presented — and in effect judged — offenders against the norms of village life, although they also had, to some extent, to cooperate in defending the interests of the lord. In practice the lords had relatively little entrepreneurial impact on the peasant economy. Their only success was to skim off the surplus of peasant production, guaranteed by superior force, the help they were given by officials of the state, the institution of servile villeinage and, not least, the power of ideas preached by the official church — ideas about social harmony and hierarchical subordination. Nevertheless the cohesion of the village community was an important element in defence, and offence, for the maintenance of certain basic rights of the subordinated class. It should never be supposed that the most successful class struggles are waged by the totally suppressed and deprived. The day to day pressure on the lords by the peasant communities was a training ground for both small and larger scale action to come.

The growth of industry

In addition to the fundamental contradiction between the payers and the receivers of feudal rent there were other tensions of particular relevance to the areas where the rising in 1381 was most successful. It was in East Anglia and the Home Counties that the feudal economy was most industrialised and most monetised. The evidence of the tax collectors of 1380-1 whose activities provoked the rebellion shows that these areas — especially East Anglia and Essex — were developing an important rural textile industry. This was a development which supplemented rather than supplanted and rivalled the older established urban textile industries. The basis for this knowledge is that in these tax returns the collectors had been instructed to put down the occupations of the taxpayers. We also have confirmation from the records of the taxes levied on cloth sales (the ulnage) that this was an area of precocious industrial development. But a developing industry, with a service element associated with it, generates two important consequences in a peasant society. First, the proportion of wage earners in the population increases. Now, since the population collapse associated with the Black Death of 1349, the government, faced with a labour shortage, had attempted to help employers by legislation (the Statute of Labourers) not merely to keep wages at the pre-Black Death level, but to hinder the free movement of labour so as to give advantage to manorial lords. This wage freeze had been enforced at the sessions of the Justices of the Peace, who were drawn from the landowning class, no doubt one of the reasons for the hostility to justices in 1381. The second consequence was that peasants had an expanding market for agricultural produce. The institution of serfdom, restrictions in marketing and the increasing fiscal burden, all operated against the rising expectations of the peasantry, just as the enforcement of the Statute of Labourers operated against the expectations of the wage-earners.

The assertion of free status

It was not, however, only in the two or three decades preceding the revolt that the

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peasants developed practices and ideas which helped them to mobilise in 1381, important though the experience of the post 1349 'feudal reaction' may have been. During the period of that reaction, lords attempted to compensate for falling rents (due to a shortage of tenants) by exploiting as far as they could the financial aspects of private jurisdiction over unfree tenants. But this was an old story for the villeins. Ever since the 12th century they had been attempting to combat demands for labour services, and those other earmarks of villeinage such as marriage fines, heriots (death duties) and arbitrary tallages. What is interesting about these conflicts is that the economic struggle to minimise these seigneurial levies on peasant production developed a highly significant ideological justification, namely the assertion of free status. If one was free, these demands were unjustified. The disputes were frequently referred to the public, or royal, courts. Here the peasants hired lawyers, who argued, no doubt in their presence, that freedom of status and tenure was their natural right. The assertion of freedom against feudal subordination was not, as is often supposed, a specific contribution of the bourgeoisie, but of the peasantry of the feudal era. Right up to the eve of the rebellion these claims were being fought for in the courts. In 1377 for example, the gentry petitioned Parliament to the effect that their unfree tenants were withholding rents and services, under the pretext that their ancestors in the time of Domesday Book (1086) — of which they had actually bought copies from the appropriate government department — had not been obliged to perform these services. A statute was therefore enacted that such rebellious persons should be imprisoned. And in fact we know that the gentry petitioners, mostly from Hampshire, Wiltshire and Surrey, were quite right. Their tenants *were* behaving in this way; these lords said that they feared a repetition of the French Jacquerie of 1358 — and they *were* right.

It is not surprising therefore, that freedom and the end of lordship were prominent demands in 1381, together with other remarkably radical demands, such as the confiscation of the property of the wealthy church landowners and its redistribution among the parishioners. Nor should it be surprising that these demands, which seem to emerge specifically from the conflict between landlords and tenants, should also be backed by the urban lower classes. Since 1349 the urban populations had been considerably sustained by rural immigrants who may well have retained rural links, and who may have been painfully aware of the hostility of urban

day to day pressure on the lords by the peasant communities was a training ground for both small and larger scale action to come

oligarchs to persons of unfree status. But this far reaching programme was not simply a development from the experience of two centuries of localised conflict over terms of tenure in the law courts. The rebellion in 1381 is interesting, in comparison with many other peasant movements in medieval Europe, precisely because its leaders — and maybe many of the rank and file — made the leap from specific grievances about rents, wages and terms of tenure to a more generalised set of concepts. It might indeed be asked whether so widespread a movement would have been possible without the cohesion given to it by a leadership with an ideology which went beyond specific short term demands.

John Ball

John Ball and his fellow clerics seem to have reinforced the peasant demands for freedom of status and tenure by a broader articulation of contemporary feelings. The fact that these expressions of basic attitudes and intentions now seem naive and utopian is irrelevant. *Then* they challenged contemporary wisdom, and the fact that Ball was in and out of the Archbishop of Canterbury's prisons from the 1360s shows that the ruling class was taking him seriously. Freedom and equality were justified thus: 'We be all come from one father and one mother, Adam and Eve' . . . 'serfdom was brought by the unjust and evil oppression of men, against the will of God' . . . 'when Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?'. According to Jean Froissart, Ball also said 'matters goeth not well to pass in England nor shall do till everything be in common'. In spite of the demands for the enjoyment of common access to pastures, hunting grounds and fisheries which were made in some areas (for instance, Hertfordshire) in 1381, one suspects that a return to primitive communism was something attributed to the rebels by hostile propagandists. It was not a normal, or natural peasant demand, though it might occur in the millennarian visions of some Christian heretics. It did not appear in the 1381 programmes.

John Ball was not a 'half-crazy hedge priest' as one historian has called him.[2] He had other members of the clerical intelligentsia at his side and he continued a strong European tradition. What is remarkable is the way that their vision of a society of free and equal men and women fused with the ancient peasant demand for freedom of status and tenure, in the fomulation of a programme which, though entirely incapable of realisation, given the historical forces at work in the late middle ages, did challenge root and branch the ideas of the ruling class. These ideas were deeply rooted, preached from pulpits and accepted as truisms by even such unconventional thinkers as the poet William Langland. They asserted that society was composed of a harmonious inter-related body of orders or estates, into each of which men and women were born and in which they should remain, according to a divine plan. The original framework was that of the three orders, of those who pray (the churchmen), those who fight (the feudal aristocracy) and those who work (the peasantry). Between the 9th century, when this was formulated and the 14th, many other orders had to be accommodated, with the development of towns, commerce and industry. But the basic concept remained — each one to his or her calling, as ordered by God.

This social concept was radically challenged in 1381. The fact that masses of English plebeians, under the influence of clerical radical thinkers, were able to challenge so powerful a system of ruling ideas, is one of the most remarkable aspects of the rebellion. Attitudes were certainly changed. There are clear signs after 1381 of an end to deference — temporarily at any rate. It may be that the relaxation of the pressure of manorial lordship, in permitting the free development of petty commodity production, was a significant step forward towards agrarian capitalism. Is it possible that this was not only the result of demographic and economic developments, but also because, at a certain moment the ideas of the ruling class ceased to be the ruling ideas of society? □

[1]R B Dobson, *The Peasants Revolt of 1381*, p17.
[2]K B Macfarlane, *Wycliffe and the Beginnings of English Nonconformity*.

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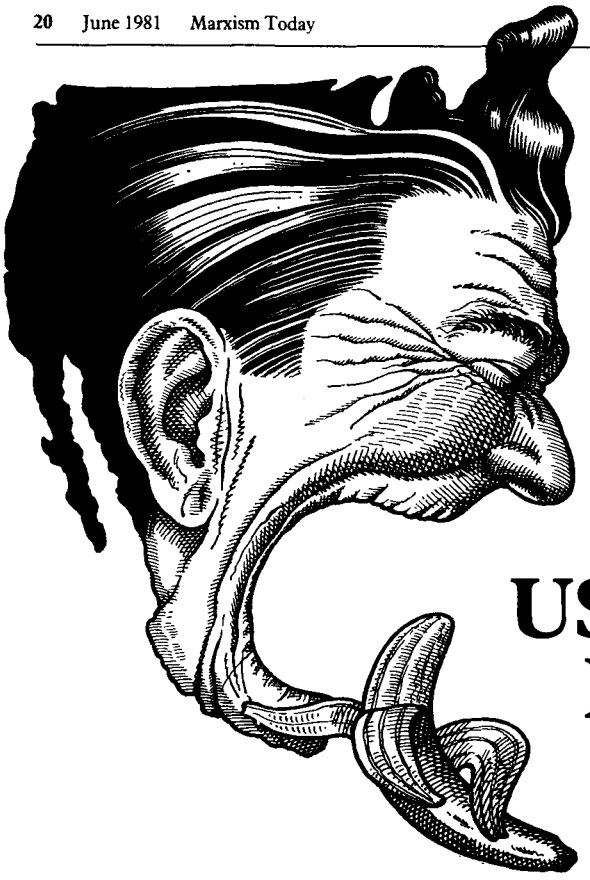

Will El Salvador be Reagan's Vietnam?

US Policy Toward Latin America

Interview with Saul Landau

Reagan has just restored trade relations with Chile. What do you anticipate his attitude towards Chile over the period of his administration is going to be?

Well, in our terms we would call it gross. I think Reagan's going to soul-kiss Pinochet. I think that Chile after the coup became the absolute darling of the world's right wing. It was the prized bastard child, the one they loved more than any other, more than the South Koreans, the Indonesians, the Taiwanese or the Brazilians. Chile was the doll. Reagan is one of the members of the worldwide ultra-right wing. Clearly human rights is not an issue in his policy. I think that he will spare nothing to prop up, shore up, support in every way, and legitimise the bastard regime.

I don't think he's going to get away with all this. I think there's going to be a lot of flak and protest. I think it's going to come from religious groups as well as from the more traditional sources of political disagreement. I think he's going to run into trouble even with his own bureaucracy.

> Chile after the coup became the darling of the world's right wing. It was the prized bastard child, the one they loved more than any other

Looking back, how would you evaluate Carter's foreign policy?

What Carter did in his foreign policy probably marked the greatest successes that American governments have had in foreign policy in many years. Unfortunately for him, because of his bungling and incompetence in political management, and his apparent incoherence and inability to hang two thoughts logically to each other, he went out in a blaze of obscurity. Let me just list partially the successes he did have.

The first and most important one is the Panama Canal Treaty. The second, more important perhaps, but unfortunately not fully realised, was the SALT II treaty. He didn't get it past the Senate, but he did get it past the Russians, and that was a formidable agreement, taking a long time, much tact and diplomacy to work out.

Where he screwed up was always at home. He had a Cyrus Vance and in Paul Warnke at arms control really an able team. In Africa I think he utilised Andrew Young and made possible the Zimbabwean solution by refusing to lift sanctions, despite the tremendous pressure from the Right, and indeed the Centre in the United States, to do so. The pay-off for that is that IBM is now selling hundreds of millions of dollars of machinery to Nigeria; where previously Americans only sold arms and food to Africa, now they are designing hotels and all kinds of things.

If you look behind the idealism of Andy Young, Jimmy Carter, Cyrus Vance, you see this very concrete national interest in terms of the multinational corporations. At least holding the line on Angola — this was a move supported by Gulf Oil and Citibank. And the Namibia solution is not a solution wanted only by the groups like SWAPO. It's certain US banking and industrial concerns that would also like to see the Namibia solution apply.

Also important was one of the premises that Carter enunciated for his foreign policy — human rights. He figured out he could sell this to the Right in his own administration, namely Brezinski, by saying that it could be utilised against the Soviets. He nevertheless wielded it very ably in certain respects against right wing dictators, in Korea and in Latin America expecially. It also meant that individuals were freed, or were stopped from being arrested, tortured, or disappearing. The human rights policy really cut the floor from under the ring wing dictators in Latin America, not in the sense of punishing them with very heavy sanctions, but rather punishing them by withdrawing the legitimation of the only power in the world that gives them any legitimacy. The human rights policy also opened up a door for more liberal and left wing elements to attack, to criticise and to organise.

How do you see Reagan's attitude towards Latin America differing from that of the previous Carter administration?

Interview conducted by Mike Gatehouse

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I think Reagan and the gang that supported him saw Latin America as very crucial long before the election. There's a group in Washington called the American Security Council, which brings together a variety of right wing fronts and groups who began organising years ago and got their big push when Carter promoted the Panama Canal Treaty. They lined up against the Canal, and called Carter a traitor for giving the Panama Canal away.

The real objective, however, of all of the right wing policy on Latin America is Cuba. To them, Cuba is the sin of sins — the occurrence of a communist regime, not just in our hemisphere, in our Munroe doctrine area, but 90 miles from America's shore; a regime that has withstood all the attempts by successive American governments to overthrow it. And if anything it is strengthened and has won almost every diplomatic battle or encounter with the United States.

The right wing hates Cuba with a passion probably unequalled except for the hate they have for the Soviet Union. So when you look at US policy towards Central American, or towards the Caribbean or even towards the Southern Cone dictatorships, you have to see Cuba as the special obsession. I think that for the first time there's going to be a serious attempt now to roll back the carpet. Not just to achieve a freeze in the present state of relations of the United States with the rest of the hemisphere, but seriously to roll it back. And this of course brings up El Salvador, because that's where the roll-back starts.

When Reagan says that El Salvador is a test case, or Haig says it, what he's talking about is American *will*. And what he thinks of as American will is the will to withstand another communist takeover. He sees El Salvador as an East/West conflict, which it is not, and he has forced the definition of the Salvadorean situation into East/West terms.

When he defines international terrorism now, he defines it exclusively in Salvadorean terms. Terrorism has nothing to do with Pinochet and his gang murdering Letelier and Moffitt in Washington — that's not international terrorism. That may in fact be defined before long as just retribution. What terrorism is is the aiding and abetting of 'left-wing guerrillas' in El Salvador by the Soviet Union, Cuba and Nicaragua, the three targets, the three obsessions in American policy. So the roll-back starts in this test case.

American *will*. Will to what? Well, will to threaten and scream and shout, at least in the initial stages. There was no threat to send in troops to El Salvador. There was a threat however to take action against Cuba. There was also an implied threat to take action against Nicaragua.

I think we need to say something here more generally about the Reagan administration. What we're facing is the first *ideological* administration that we Americans have known. I have not in my lifetime ever seen an administration use ideology like this one does, and mean what it says. This regime is ideological, and we have in a sense to restudy American politics because we've never had to deal with that before.

Every other administration has sought consensus: a right wing Republican appoints liberal Democrats in at least one or two places: or liberal Democrats will appoint middle-of-the-road or rightish Republicans in high places, just to show that there's really no hard feelings, the establishment is one unit. Not this group. Other than Casper Weinberger, the Secretary of Defence, this is a right wing gang. We have a Secretary of Labour who is anti-labour to the core; a Secretary in charge of the Environment who plans to destroy the environment; Secretaries of Education, Welfare, who oppose education and welfare. All down the line you have an amazing collection of right wingers who, all of them, are mouthing an ideology that comes very close to repression or threats of repression, and which has a big racist insinuation, albeit the words are never actually spoken.

El Salvador, February '81. Young civilians are beaten by soldiers and police in the back of an army truck.

This has been its appeal. And I think it plans to work on this appeal to win victories in places like El Salvador. To be sure, it inherited some of its Salvador policy from Carter. Carter created a mythical Centre in El Salvador, and helped engineer a coup against the right wing General Romero (not to be confused with the Bishop), placing in power a so-called Centre government. The irony of course is that almost all of the key people that Carter placed in have by now resigned and joined the opposition, or been booted out, including his chief military man, Colonel Majano. The myth of the Centre, however, is still maintained. Only now the Reagan group doesn't give a damn whether you call it the Right or the Centre — it's the government now.

Do you think the situation is likely to develop in El Salvador where the US administration will have to take a decision either to invade or to step back, and if so, how do you think it would respond?

I don't know. I don't think in the near future, that is before the election in 1982, that this administration is going to send troops anywhere, without there being some terrible emergency. I think the dispatching of US troops to any foreign land would defeat the political plan to capture the Lower House in 1982. So I don't think he's going to do it.

I do think he's going to revitalise the Nixon/Kissinger Vietnamisation Plan. That's what we're seeing right now in El Salvador. Get these little 'grease-ball spicks' into shape, right. That's the order to the American military. Advisors, equipment, heavy training, bring them up to Fort Bragg, bring them up to Texas, get them into shape to fight a war. So that will be the plan: all the aircraft you need, all the mobile support, all the artillery that'll flow in. Then you'll have AID teams going in there to shore up the economy to make the Government look attractive, even to print a newspaper which occasionally disagrees with the government — just as a showpiece. This is the kind of politics I would look for in El Salvador, with at the same time the maintenance of heavy threats against Nicaragua and Cuba.

> General Haig resorted to a Lewis Carroll caricature and told them in no uncertain terms that terrorism is what he says it is

On Cuba, you said that this was a particular bête noir *of the American Right. But in practice how will Reagan's attitude differ from previous American administrations?*

The Carter administration had by far and away the best relations with Cuba since the revolution. A whole series of positive steps were taken short of re-establishing full relations. I don't think any new positive

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steps will be taken under Reagan. I do think there will be some rolling back of the old steps.

For example, about two weeks ago the Cuban Interest Section in Washington[1] was declared *persona non grata* on the grounds that it was 'attempting to promote commercial and trade relations between Cuba and the United States' — a clear signal. The Cubans have been told, in the recent period, in no uncertain terms, that if they don't stop shipping arms to El Salvador, they're going to get it. What 'it' is has not been defined. However the old trial balloons have gone out, the naval blockade, the mining of Cuban harbours, the selected air strikes, and so on. All of these have been thrown out to the press as possibilities. So it's a politics of threat, blackmail.

In the past Fidel Castro has won literally every political battle against American Presidents. As somebody once remarked, for an American President to go against Fidel in any kind of one-to-one encounter, Fidel would have to check his brains at the door to decide it they could even start.

What about the attitude of other Latin American countries? Particular countries like Mexico and Venezuela not only have different attitudes now to those they held in the 60s, but they're also to some extent economically more independent of the US than they were then.

I think that's very important, especially with regard to Mexico. I wouldn't count on Venezuela. That's a separate case. Europeans should view with great caution, and have very low expectations of Venezuela under the Christian Democrat government. Just as a footnote, Venezuela's intelligence service is and has for a long time been controlled by right wing Cuban exiles, all of whom are closely linked to the CIA.

But Mexico is in a different situation. Mexico is really developing into a regional power; thanks not only to its oil and gas resources but also to the significant industrial progress it has made over the last 20 years.

The Mexican President, Lopez Portillo, has declared that an attack on Cuba is an attack on Mexico. Does he mean it? I don't know, but he did say it, and the words were not lost in Washington. The United States shares certain common problems with Mexico. I'm not going to talk about availability of oil and gas because I don't think they're going to be in the ball-game right now. There are some very serious issues involving the border. Serious issues involving the dope trade.

The United States would like Mexico, or it says it would, to stop growing poppies and pouring heroin and marijuana into the United States. Well, Mexico says it's very anxious and enthusiastic to co-operate in this. To do so would mean considerable loss of revenue for many Mexican farmers, to say nothing of Mexican gangsters and businessmen, and the cuts taken by the variety of Mexican officials. Perhaps more important is the border dispute, in terms of how many *brazeros* — migrant labourers — can come into the United States each year. If the United States were to offer to Mexico what it offered to the Cubans, that is open the border and say free migration in, it would probably mean between 25 and 30 million Mexicans coming into the US in the course of the first month. Now that's a serious issue between the two countries.

I think Mexico is deeply committed to non intervention, and when they say non intervention they're not worried about Cuban arms, or Nicaraguan arms to the Frente Democratico in El Salvador. What they worry about is US intervention. Even Argentina, Chile and Brazil are worried about US intervention. They just don't like it, having tasted it so many times before.

So we may have to look to Mexico to take the leadership in settling the Salvadorean issue, and it may be for the powers of Europe, both East and West, to reinforce Mexico's position as the logical, natural and most able power in that area to solve the Salvadorean predicament.

Guillermo Ungo of the Frente has declared a willingness to negotiate, to talk, and I'm sure if the United States would agree to non intervention, that is to halt the shipment of arms and advisors, I have a feeling that Cuba and Nicaragua would also agree to the same. What you have is the setting up of a Zimbabwean solution, if you like, with Central American modifications. And if one can just move the metaphor over, at this point I would say: 'let's strengthen the front-line states'.

You've described the new American administration as being rightist in a new fashion, both in foreign policy and domestically. That Latin America has a special place in its foreign policy. That it's very anxious to roll back the advances that have taken place there over the past couple of decades. But in trying to do that it's confronted with very severe domestic as well as regional constraints. Would you like to comment further on that?

What's the ace in the hole domestically? You know, sometimes a war is the best cover-up for unpopular domestic policies. The first thing Reagan's done is get the United States off on the wrong foot in El Salvador. He has defined politics in a very peculiar way, telling a rather sophisticated press and public what terrorism is. General Haig resorted to a Lewis Carroll caricature and told them in no uncertain terms that terrorism is what he says it is.

Domestically, the poor, already suffering in the United States as they have for a long time, are going to suffer more, especially the aged poor. Those who are really dependent upon food stamps and full Medicare and Medicaid payments, the black poor, I'm certain that the Reagan administration will think of something to make their problems more acute.

I think this administration is looking for confrontation. I think they are looking for a face-off in Central America and I think they are looking for a face-off at home. They're looking for blacks to riot, and they're looking for students to demonstrate. And I think each one will be treated with swat teams and similar types of affairs. This may be the way they will go for 1982. They're not going to send troops abroad, but they are going to show a strong hand, the old father figure, the old moral majority, not afraid to stand up to those people. They won't be called niggers, commies, hippies or anything like that, but everybody will know that's what he means when he says 'those people' or some such euphemism. I think it is a real possibility. So, yes, there will be domestic strife. But Reagan is not looking for consensus, and he has not offered any compromise.

But one reason I don't think it can last is the American press. The American press, if you want to describe it in one word, is destructive. I don't think that the Reagan people yet see what is going to happen to them. People are going to start to laugh at them, and I don't think they can take ridicule. I think they are really going to crack up under it. And that may be the achilles heel before 1982. They're going to start to look stupid, and the more stupid they look, the more they are going to appeal to this moral majority, and that gives the chance for the opposition to organise.

How will it organise? Well, the blacks, the poor, the workers, the chicanos, the women, the gays, the vast coalition of those who have won rights for themselves in the past, with blood, with sweat, are they going to be able to get together an umbrella organisation? Some kind of coalition? And stand up and start to fight? This is the unknown. I have faith in my own people. But we're going to have to wait and see.

[1] Because Cuba and the US do not have diplomatic relations, they had established 'Interest Sections' in each others country — *Ed.*

Transcript typed by Eda Ciccone.

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Discussion

Goodbye to Détente?

Sam Russell

In this article, I want to look at Soviet foreign policy in the context of the discussion in John Cox's article in the September issue of *Marxism Today*. New perspectives in the struggle for peace and international disarmament and detente have been opened up by the decisions of the 26th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union based on the report by its General Secretary, President Leonid Brezhnev. As he pointed out, action to lessen the danger of war and curb the arms race is even more urgent today because of the rapid changes that are taking place in the development of military technology, including new weapons of mass destruction.

'These are weapons of a type that may make control over them, and therefore their agreed limitation, extremely difficult if not impossible', Leonid Brezhnev said. 'A new round of the arms race will upset international stability and greatly increase the danger of another war'.

On the limitation and reduction of strategic arms, he said the Soviet Union 'is prepared to continue the relevant negotiations that have so far been achieved in this area,' while he also put forward the suggestion that 'a moratorium should be set on the deployment in Europe of new medium range nuclear missile weapons of the NATO countries and the Soviet Union, that is to freeze the existing quantitative and qualitative level of these weapons, including the US forward based nuclear weapons in this region'. To this he added the proposal for the extension of the existing zone of confidence-building measures 'to the entire European part of the USSR, providing the Western states too extend the confidence zone accordingly'. Mr Brezhnev also said that it was 'dangerous madness' for the US and the Soviet Union 'to try and outstrip each other in the arms race or to expect to win a nuclear war.' And he called for 'an active dialogue' between the two countries, including 'meetings at summit level' and a special session of the UN Security Council 'with the participation of the top leaders of its member states in order to look for keys to improving the international situation and preventing war.'

In his closing speech to Congress, Mr Brezhnev said that the main aim of Soviet foreign policy was the safeguarding of peace, adding: 'Our foreign policy programme is a programme of continuing and deepening detente, a programme of stopping the arms race.' However, there appears to be a growing gap in this foreign policy programme between the potential arising from the socialist character of Soviet society and the implementation of the programme in decisions which could really halt the arms race, particularly in the nuclear field.

As can be seen from the record since 1964, when the present top leadership came to power, Soviet foreign policy has many achievements to its credit, among them the *de jure* recognition by the West of the states and frontiers of Eastern and Central Europe, the beginning of an understanding with the US on limiting the nuclear arms race, effective help to Vietnam (against US and then Chinese aggression), Cuba and Angola long term cooperative relations with India and large scale economic exchange between socialist and capitalist Europe. At the same time, on the evidence of the last five years or so, the gap between what the interests of the Soviet Union require and the position taken by its leaders has tended in certain important respects to grow wider. We are not in the zone of almost fatal miscalculation, epitomised by the SovietGerman pact of 1939, but the consequences of this widening gap are already fairly serious.

Irrespective of whether one is critical or not of Soviet foreign policy, it is fairly evident that during these five years or so the situation, looked at from the point of view of the interests of the Soviet Union, has changed for the worse. The most obvious sign of this is that the element of conflict in Soviet relations with all four of the other main centres of power, the US, Western Europe, Japan and China, has increased. There has also taken place a certain erosion of Soviet authority and prestige in the hearts and minds of thinking people everywhere in the capitalist world and to a lesser extent in the Third World too. While the underlying long term social and political tendencies within the capitalist and former colonial worlds are predominantly favourable to the interests of the Soviet Union and to socialism generally, it would seem that those responsible for top level Soviet foreign policy decisions have to an increasing extent in recent years misjudged the global dynamics of international relations, failed to see the consequences of their own actions and, in certain cases, have lost ground which appeared already to have been gained.

The role of the armed forces

The feature of contemporary Soviet foreign policy which, contrary to the intentions and expectations of its authors, does most damage to the interests of the Soviet Union is an undialectical one sided conception of the role in world politics of the country's armed forces, an inability to establish in this field the right proportions and priorities in order to obtain the desired result, namely the security and well being of Soviet society and world peace. The leadership is sincere in saying, as it frequently does, that it desires a progressive limitation of the nuclear arms race, a lowering of the level of armed forces and weapons in Central Europe, the development of constructive peaceful co-existence in the Western Pacific. But for several years it has by its own policy in practice made the attainment of such aims more difficult.

What appears to have happened in the last five or six years is that at certain crucial turning points in policy making, the views of the military authorities with their professional interest in maximalising the country's armed strength, have prevailed over the views of those who are called upon to assess the overall influence of Soviet military policy on the country's international interests.

Nuclear arms race

The most critical, but by no means the only problem to which this applies is the problem of the nuclear arms race. Nobody in their senses would question the necessity of maintaining the means of inflicting unacceptable damage on the US, China or any other state responsible for launching a nuclear attack on the Soviet Union or its allies. But the nuclear arms race has developed in such a way that not only the US, but also the Soviet Union now maintains and renews a gigantic surplus of nuclear striking power, which could not in any circumstances be essential for the purpose named. Moreover, the Soviet Union, as if it were hypnotised by the size and variety of US

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nuclear forces, is continually adding to its own overkill capacity, not only with no advantage to itself, but with seriously harmful consequences.

The latest instance of this is the introduction, now well advanced, of a new generation of nuclear rockets targeted on Western Europe and its adjacent seas and territories. The Soviet leadership evidently believed that the introduction of the SS-20 rockets would not compel West Germany, Britain and some other states of Western Europe to accept upon their territories a new generation of US weapons of roughly comparable capacity, but in fact it has. The net result is, or shortly will be unless there is a change in Soviet policy, a rise in the level of nuclear confrontation in Europe with no compensating advantage to the Soviet Union, indeed quite the reverse. The whole operation would only have made sense if the Soviet Union had no other certain means of inflicting unacceptable damage on a US or European nuclear aggressor, which is far from being the case. As it is, there seems to be an absence of a valid conception of what forces are sufficient for this purpose and also of the ability correctly to foresee the reaction of West European governments.

The position of the Carter and now of the Reagan government and their monopoly capital masters is easy to understand. The reproduction of capital in the US has for decades depended to a considerable extent on large state expenditures on arms, which can within rather wide limits be increased without serious damage to the civilian economy.

This is not, however, the case with the Soviet Union. In terms of the stability of their capitalist society it costs the Americans far less than it costs the Soviet Union to maintain a high military share of GDP. Thus, apart from the direct financial interests of the US military-industrial complex, the US ruling class has a long term political interest in forcing the Soviet Union, if it can, into a spiral of rising military expenditure, capable of hampering the development of its socialist economy and that of its East European allies. In this connection it has to be understood that the interests of the Soviet Union and the US are not symmetrical. The real level of Soviet sufficiency in arms, even counting the China factor, that is the need to maintain forces along the frontier with China, is lower than that of the US. Small as they are, even the British or French strategic nuclear forces are 'sufficient' in the sense that they are an assured means of inflicting damage on an aggressor on a scale unacceptable to any sane person.

Restraining centrifugal tendencies

Furthermore, from Washington's point of view, the drift during the last two or three years towards a rise in the level of confrontation of Euro-strategic weapons has had the advantage that it has increased the dependence of the West European powers on the US and to some extent slowed down the long term centrifugal tendencies within the US-Western relationship as a whole and within NATO in particular. Washington's policy of stationing new nuclear systems in Europe is directed against the USSR, but it also is intended to strengthen, and has already strengthened the position of the US in relation to its allies. As shown by the 20 years experience of Gaullist tendencies in the policy of the West European powers, such a turn of events is not to the advantage of the Soviet Union, far from it. The objective and very solid basis for the specific, and for the Soviet Union very favourable character of the 'Eastern' policies of France, West Germany, Italy and other capitalist states of Western Europe has not, of course, been destroyed, but the installation of the SS-20s by the Soviet Union has hampered, to put it mildly, the constructive development of those policies.

A failure to establish the correct military priorities required to ensure the security of the Soviet Union is also to be observed in Soviet policy around the problem of lowering the level of conventional weapons and forces confronting each other in Europe. The Soviet Union has a sizeable advantage over the Western powers in this field and, by agreeing to a disproportionately large reduction of its own forces, could have both preserved a sufficient deterrent force against Western aggression and secured substantial political and economic gains for itself, as well as gaining support among public opinion in general in the West by agreeing to such reductions. Instead, during eight years of fruitless negotiations in Vienna, the Soviet side has given the impression that it attaches a very low priority to a mutual reduction of conventional forces and weapons.

Other areas

To some extent, this Soviet attitude seems to be determined by the same inability as in the nuclear field to establish a valid concept of what military forces are sufficient or insufficient for the purpose of maintaining a lower and stable East-West conventional balance in Europe. But in this case, a more rational approach is complicated, if not precluded by another factor, namely by the belief that large conventional Soviet military forces are required in or near Eastern Europe for the purpose of preventing by force, as in Czechoslovakia in 1968, the growth of what is regarded as anti-socialist tendencies in the other socialist states. Many Communist parties, including our own, have made it clear that they regarded and still regard the use of military force in Czechoslovakia, or against any other country seeking its own road to socialism, as damaging not only to the interests of their parties and the progressive forces generally, but as damaging to the Soviet Union itself.

Another area in which Soviet interests and the interests of the peace forces have been damaged by a failure to find a correct balance between political and military values, has been in the Far East and the Western Pacific. During the last 20 years it has become increasingly clear that Japan, while basing its foreign policy on its alliance with the US, was interested in stabilising its political relations with both the Soviet Union and China, not least as a means of opening the road to large scale trade and economic exchanges. It also became clear in the 1970s that China was moving towards a rapprochment with Japan, partly as a means of isolating the Soviet Union in accordance with the dictates of its anti-Soviet strategy. Parallel moves by the Soviet Union towards Japan and vice versa made considerable progress, but the achievement of a stable rapprochement, came to depend to a large extent on whether or not the Soviet Union was willing to return to Japan the southern Kurile islands, occupied since the end of World War II.

Faced with the attempts of the Chinese to build a common front with Japan and other imperialist powers against the Soviet Union and also against Vietnam, and bearing in mind the desirability on other grounds as well as that of a normalisation of Soviet-Japanese relations, political logic pointed clearly towards restitution of the islands as a small price to pay for a much larger gain. The islands may have a potential military value of some sort, but none comparable with the political value of reaching agreement with Japan. It should also be remembered that the Japanese Communist Party has consistently called for restitution of the islands, while strenuously opposing all plans to drag Japan in the wake of US imperialism.

While recognising the basic peace elements in Soviet foreign policy, a critical appraisal is necessary not only of Soviet actions in Afghanistan for example, but also in areas of Africa, such as Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa, where it is difficult to see how military action can either ensure legitimate Soviet interests in the area, or secure a stabilisation of a highly unstable situation, or a settlement on a socialist basis of antagonisms between rival political groups and liberation movements.

But the key factor in the situation, the

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central imperative of international relations today is the absolute necessity, above all in the Soviet Union's own interests, to secure a lowering of the level of military confrontation in the Euro-Atlantic region, of securing a turn round in the rapidly rocketing spiral of nuclear confrontation. This cannot be done unless there are changes not only in Western policy, but in Soviet policy also. The new perspectives for peace certainly exist, but greater flexibility and understanding of the dialectics of the situation is required if these perspectives are to be translated into reality.

Goodbye to Détente?

Ian Davison

My general argument in this response to the discussion on 'Goodbye to Detente?' will be (1) that popular feeling is the bedrock on which we build campaigns in practice, and (2) that popular perceptions can be nearer the core truth than the analyses of the intellectual leaders of the disarmament movement. This general approach is regarded with suspicion by Marxists, as being unprincipled. The very word 'opportunist' is regarded as a term of abuse. Likewise the description 'populist'. But the key Marxist function for theory is to *effect* successful practice, *learning* in turn from practice.

Arms control

The question of 'arms control' or 'arms limitation', as opposed to real disarmament, is one case in point. Like the distinction between unilateralism and multilateralism, the distinction between 'arms control' and disarmament poses dangers to us. We can certainly argue that little progress has been made in multilateral disarmament negotiations, and the evidence is clearly there. But we cannot argue that 'arms control' has made no contribution to peace (and 'detente'). To reject arms control is to allow a wedge to be driven between us and the 'moderate' but universal aspirations for 'peace' in a vague sense. The desire for 'peace', in this rather unformed, millenial sense, is not the property merely of apologists for all Soviet foreign policy. It is a commonsense feeling, and we must build on it.

The fact that the establishment and the militarists have to claim to want 'peace' is not merely an acknowledgement of the strength of the socialist bloc and of the power of nuclear weapons. It is also a recognition of the *popular* demand for peace. And we can exploit this concession, by concentrating on the contradictions of not following the logic of arms control, through 'arms limitation', and into real measures of disarmament. This in turn leads to revelations of the hypocrisy of those who will not proceed to unilateralist assumptions *where necessary*.

It can certainly be shown that much of the *actual* arms limitation which has gone on has been a charade, out of democratic control, and not matching meaningful popular aspirations. But we cannot argue that genuine arms control demands would not be worth implementing, given the limitless present horizons of the continuing arms race. Where popular feeling is centred on 'arms control', we should be stressing the *levels* of armament: the future destructiveness and present waste. We should stress the arbitrary nature of 'levels' of armament; the need for very low levels of military 'balance' *or* imbalance.

In short, we could *use* arms control better in the peace movement, sounding positive, raising existing popular demands towards real disarmament, and bringing out the contradictions in the claim that 'peace is our profession' in the military-industrial complex. It was not the arms control manoeuvring of the late 1960s and early 1970s which lulled the public's anxiety. It was the *whole* climate of co-existence and detente (and the peace movement's successes in the early 1960s).

How 'bad' is the Soviet Union?

This question is a difficult one. It is even harder if it is formulated (so often) as a comparison between two (or more) countries, in terms of arms expenditure or overall military strengths or 'aggressive stances'. It is not a question with which people in general concern themselves in detail. Most people are either very prejudiced against the Soviet Union, or they trust it no more than the US, or any other foreign state. They also know, or see easily, that a direct invasion of Britain by the Soviet Union is not a likely event. They have in the past accepted the slightly more sophisticated idea of forward defence, against both military pressure and political protection rackets, in the NATO alliance.

For what it's worth, I'm not convinced by Paul Nicholls' (April issue) apparent failure to understand Dan Smith's (in February issue) point about the Soviet Union responding unfortunately 'in kind' with weapons systems. The point is that to condemn neutron bombs, then say you will deploy them if the other side does, cannot make much sense. And the answer to tanks is not necessarily your own tanks, but perhaps anti-tank missiles. NATO has understood this well, and turned it to good advantage in propaganda about tank and personnel imbalances. The Soviet Union is failing by comparison to capitalise on NATO tactical nuclear superiority (1) by starting to deploy fair numbers of tacticals itself, and (2) allowing NATO to invent the new 'theatre nuclear weapons' category, to fit SS-20s etc, where NATO is typically weaker. But is all this important for our popular campaigns?

I reiterate: the niceties of the 'balance' are not the chief concern of our people. Nor are the motivation and intentions of the Soviet leaders. If this were so, Afghanistan (as presented in the Western press especially) would have nipped the peace movement resurgence in the bud. What exercises people's fears just now is the increasing realisation that we need to be saved from our 'friends' as well as our 'enemies'. The US of Ronald Reagan is a frightening place, even to many of those people who thought Britain would be none the worse for a short, sharp radical Tory shock. The opportunity is clearly there for us to switch the debate, from estimates of how 'bad' the Soviet Union is, to an assessment of how bad the US is, has been, and could become. People don't want to 'die for Reagan'. The 'theatre nuclear war' concept has rebounded, as the people of Britain realise *they* are expendable, just like the West Germans, in the eyes of the US.

Our task is to build on the *type* of concern which has already developed, to spell out the reactionary record of the US, NATO, and our own professional armed forces: their lack of consistent concern for the quality of life lived by the ordinary people in any country, their lack of respect for human life itself. 'Protection' is a racket, not a social service.

People sense the full crisis

From a compaigning point of view, I don't think John Cox's (September issue) failure to stress the recent 'developments in military technology and strategy' is crucial. It is true that the Cruise missile for Britain acted as a vital geographical *focus* for a lot of new campaigning. But it was not the *cause* of the general resurgence, which has taken place also in areas remote from the Cruise missile sites and among people who barely know of this weapon system. In fact, it could be argued that the first awareness of the *neutron bomb* several years before was a deeper rooted growth and typically, the British peace movement was slow to act on this, because (1) the Soviet Union wanted us to act fast, (2) it was seen as 'just another example of a destabilising *tactical* nuclear weapon', and (3) we failed to respect the *popular* objection to the

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neutron bomb: that it kills people, but leaves property intact (another stimulus which has been effective is the news of nuclear false alerts).

But more influential than any weapons system, has been the revival of *civil defence* thinking, talking and preparations. This actually started again under a Labour government, but was accelerated by a right wing Tory lobby, along with other forms of Thatcherism. People sense only too easily the contradictions of civil defence: especially in a crowded, small island, packed with military installations, hosts to American forces, crucial to American nuclear and other plans, integrated fully into NATO command, and led by a belligerently anti-Soviet government. The wheel is coming full circle, and the 'deterrent' seems no longer a deterrent, not so much because people are studying new weapons and strategies, but simply because you don't need 'civil defence' if the deterrent is supposed to work.

I would go further, and suggest that there is a deep, vague, commonsense awareness of the Marxist insight that war is at least partly, and sometimes principally, the result of political — economic rivalries, internal or external or both. People see the worsening of international relations before their eyes, they see the deepening economic recession, and they sense a connection. They recognise, however inarticulately, the vicious circle of militarism — economic weakness — poverty — unrest — militarism and repression. They know that money spent on frightening Russians can't be used to protect social service's or create new jobs. People can see that the pretentiousness of your defences ought to be tempered by proportion to your economic health, and to the fragility of the liberties and quality of life you are supposed to be defending.

This is not to deny that there is a danger to us from the very impetus of the arms race, from the arms lobby, and fear itself; nor to discount the added risk of particular strategies or weapons developments; nor again to undervalue the effect of knowledgeable and articulate second level argument about the arms race and disarmament. But for mass campaigning, as distinct from lobbying of a more rarified kind, we need to build on the awareness that is already there, based on moral emotions and commonsense.

So, SALT 2 should have been signed by the Americans, we won't die for Reagan, we don't want civil defence, and we want jobs not bombs — for a start. But that *means* also that we don't want Cruise, Trident, Polaris or NATO. The logic is inescapable, but initial assumptions have to be reinforced and clarified, then developed. □

The Politics of the Alternative Economic Strategy

Brian Nichols

Bob Rowthorn's article on the alternative economic strategy (AES) and the Ted Knight interview in January's *Marxism Today* made fascinating reading. However, apart from a mention by Bob Rowthorn of the expansion of the social services being one of the basic proposals of the AES there appeared to be no link between the two.

Bob Rowthorn's article was welcome, it was a refreshing development to see the AES fitted into an overall political framework and perhaps even more interesting to find someone with the courage to examine specifically how armed opposition may or may not arise in British conditions in particular circumstances. Having said this I would like to draw attention to what I consider to be the main shortcomings of the article.

Is the alternative economic strategy democratic?

Rowthorn points out that the so called AES is much more than this, but states that supporters of it usually present it in purely economic terms. But this is hardly surprising, the basic proposals that Rowthorn outlined are almost all economic demands, and as long as the AES is an alternative *economic* strategy, opponents and supporters are likely to view it as just that. Tacking social reforms onto the end of the list isn't likely to change that.

The article argues that the AES is democratic rather than revolutionary in character because it seeks to shift the mixed economy in favour of the working class and because it wishes to extend democratic control over economic and political life. This implies that democratic demands are not revolutionary *per se*. If this is the case, at what stage do democratic demands become revolutionary? Is there a sudden revolutionary leap from a mixed economy to a socialist economy which is not democratic in nature? In fact it can be argued that the AES is not democratic because, as Rowthorn states, since 'the orthodox Left in Britain as in other countries is rather conservative' the programme has been handed down from above.

I would also challenge Bob's estimate that the programme is beginning to reach significant sections of the population. At the last general election the AES was nearly as big a mystery as the Loch Ness Monster. The initiated knew about it but the mass of the labour movement including many Communist Party members, let alone the mass of the electorate, couldn't tell you what its content was. Since then, it is true, it has surfaced on occasions but still mainly by those who could already recognise it. The exception has been when one or two of the demands have been taken up in a particular struggle.

The professional politicians and economists of the Left may know what its all about but what about the rest? If the AES is the immediate stage in the *British Road to Socialism*, why hasn't it been discussed up and down the Communist Party? How can a so called democratic programme be presented, let alone won, if the most dynamic movement of the last ten years — the feminist movement — has not been involved in formulating it or its demands incorporated in the programme. How can it be a democratic programme if it argues for more state controls, but doesn't outline the democratic changes that are necessary if it is going to convince many of the Left as well as the Centre that this is desirable? The central point about the AES is not just to popularise it but to transform it by democratic changes from below. Unless this is the case won't it be yet another example of what somebody up there thinks is good enough for us down here? Not a good basis for support, especially as the ruling class and the media will fight the demands tooth and nail.

Are workers' plans enough?

In conjunction with this the other major criticism I wish to make is the apparent narrowness of who can take up and popularise the AES. This is obviously linked with the previous points, for if the programme is a narrow economic one, the potential for involvement is much less. Bob

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Rowthorn uses an excellent illustration in Lucas Aerospace — a development not often mentioned in Communist Party journals — and makes what I consider to be a key point when he writes that the workers involvement in this gave 'them confidence in their ability to change society'. But from this example he generalises that workers' plans could be drawn up throughout Britain and become a vast movement for economic and political change. Isn't this much too narrow? Leaving aside the fact that sizeable industrial enterprises are decreasing everyday, doesn't it imply that the AES is only the concern of the workers — and perhaps only industrial workers? But if the AES is to become the basis of the return of a Left government, much wider circles need to be involved.

An obvious example of this is the area of community struggles. Britain's economic crisis not only hits people at their place of work — if they have got one — but at home and in the locality, at their children's school, lack of transport, cutbacks in hospitals etc. Here the economic crisis not only affects workers, but the unemployed including youngsters who have never had a job, the other claimants of all descriptions, tenants and other ratepayers, feminists and black people, students and so on. In the locality it is not just economic questions that are at stake, but a wide range of other social problems. Again this indicates the need to transform the AES so it really is a programme for social change.

Cuts campaigns and the AES

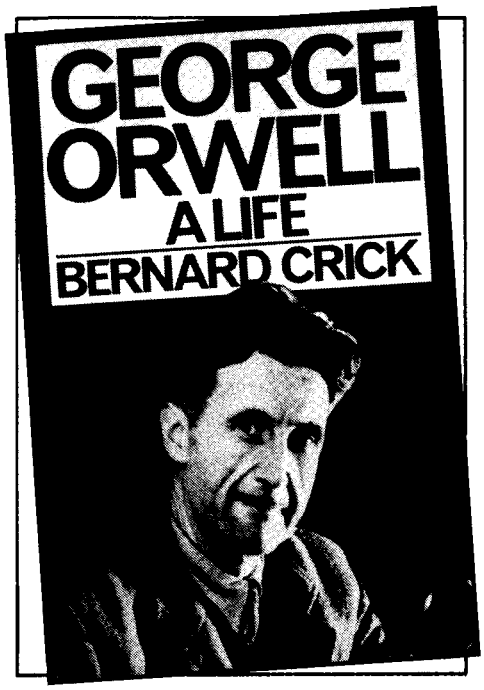
Here I would like to go back to the point I made at the start. I found it strange that the Ted Knight interview did not mention the AES. The only way the cuts can be combatted, and social services not only restored but developed in a positive way is by a number of the key aspects of the AES being implemented. Without a viable industrial and commercial base it is not possible, whatever government, to have the sort of social services we need. If this is so it follows that cuts campaigns can be an ideal vehicle for not only popularising the AES, but changing it. It is quite clear from the Lambeth and other examples that the rates question is an explosive issue. This is explicitly linked to cuts in local services and unless the Left presents viable alternatives the rates issue will remain wide open for the Right. 'Keep rates down, cut public services and jobs' will win popular support. Why not reform the rating system, bring down interest rates and improve services instead? Central government policies on rates have brought about a crisis in the localities and this gives us a chance to raise the AES as an alternative: equally it is quite clear that rate reform needs to become one of the central demands of the programme. In Kensington and Chelsea the cuts campaign is attempting to do this. It is not easy, but we are making a start. We have a real spur, one of our ratepayers is Margaret Thatcher. Last year when she was made a freeman (*sic*) of the Borough, she said 'Everything that you (the council) have done locally, we (the government) intend to do nationally.'

Whilst we wouldn't wish to make grandiose claims like this, if these and many other sorts of action were carried out up and down the country to transform the AES into a popular social programme, the desire for change could develop into a positive force moving in the direction of the *British Road to Socialism*. □

Reviews

GEORGE ORWELL, A LIFE
Bernard Crick
Secker and Warburg 1980 508pp £10.
ISBN 0 436 11450 X

'Marxists as a rule are not very good at reading the minds of their adversaries'. That was Orwell in 1936. Many Marxists have since found it necessary to try to read Orwell's mind, and at least from his public effect as a major adversary. One of the merits of Crick's new biography, which is the first to have been written with full access to his papers, is that it contains many new details at some of the crucial points. Whether in the end these affect the argument is uncertain. It is clear, on the one hand, that early and angry responses to him as a cold war propagandist were wrong. The writing, and the positions underlying it, were always more complicated and contradictory than that. But then, on the other hand, while he was early and vigorous in identifying difficulties, errors and crimes in the international socialist movement, so



many of his responses were negative that even those of us who now agree (or who from the beginning agreed) with much or all of his diagnosis have still to consider him as an adversary. What he might eventually have arrived at, through the changes in the fifties and the sixties, we cannot say. But what he actually arrived at, by the time of his early death, was a transformation of what had been mainly humane, vigorous and truthful arguments into a corrosive despair of a kind which wrecked a large part of his generation of the Left. That this despair was then marketed to and by others who would in any case have been hostile to socialism was a fact about the politics and culture of his last years. But still, though he provided the material, that marketing is not really a fact about him, and while he lived he did what he could to stop it.

It is now all quite a long time ago, and while historians will need to argue about the details of many of those phases, they will, as historians, know better than to centre their inquiries on this single paradoxical figure. There is a sense in which Orwell's life has become the most effective of his works: the Old Etonian drop-out from the Imperial Police; the plain man exploring and recording poverty; the wounded volunteer in the Spanish Civil War; the radical patriot of the war against Hitler; the international figure of *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. But then one of the effects of celebrity, and of the literary form of biography, is that it isolates a man from his contemporaries and tends to read history through his changing mind. In fact, and especially in Orwell's case, once you get close to the details you see how selective

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that worked image is. Crick's book is as full of detail as anyone could ask, but though he does not press interpretation he both sustains the popular image and yet includes enough material to illustrate the radical confusions and uncertainties which the reputation overrides as simply an honest facing of the facts. Thus at one level I can record my own impression, after a long acquaintance with Orwell's writing and accounts of his life, that the man I read about in Crick is someone I like and respect a good deal less than I had previously supposed, though I am sure that was not the biographer's intention. At various points Crick questions the kind of analysis I made in my 1970 book, that George Orwell was a created figure, a fictional writer, out of the often very different life of Eric Blair. That was a figurative analysis rather than a whole explanation, but I can only now say that I have never felt it more strongly than while reading this biography.

One key moment is the 1936 journey to the north and the subsequent writing of *The Road to Wigan Pier*. The significant differences between what happened and what he wrote are a key to that effective but simplifying and at the edges misleading Orwellian plain style. Crick is very useful on this: establishing the status of what has been published as his working diary, which now looks more like a draft (though still with interesting differences) of the eventual book; interviewing and recording the critical opinions of the socialists and other working families he then met; specifying the material and its subsequent composition. I learned a lot from this, but nearly all of it strengthened the point about an ideological process which passed as plain reporting: a willed separation of the facts of poverty and unemployment from the actual and of course diverse practice of socialist struggle. In the later and equally significant periods of Spain and the change of mind about the war there is again much fascinating detail, but it is all more intricate and engaged, and in relation to Spain, though involved with ideology, is not, so far as I can judge, ideological.

The other main interests of this biography, of a political kind (though at a personal level it is the last years of his relationship with his first wife that I cannot get out of my mind), is in the detail of his positions in his last years. The programme he held to was broadly that of the Labour Left and indeed (except in relation to the Soviet Union) of the Communist Party. He wanted the nationalisation of land, mines, banks, railways and major industries; the end of colonialism; the end of the class system in education; the abolition of the House of Lords. It is a programme that would still qualify today as 'extremist'. After the success of *Animal Farm* he insisted on keeping clear of the Right which was exploiting it:

> 'I cannot associate myself with an essentially Conservative body which claims to defend democracy in Europe but has nothing to say about British imperialism'.

He had a good general record on civil liberties, and was an early and vigorously perceptive opponent of nuclear weapons. Yet these were the years of *Nineteen Eight-Four* and of Ingsoc, which needed no footnote to be translated as English socialism. It is a bitter and tragic contradiction, and it is in more than Orwell's mind; it was the deadlock of a generation.

This is where the damage was done. As he put it himself, 'to take a rational political decision one must have a picture of the future'. But while he like others could list progressive and transforming measures in one part of his mind, all he actually saw ahead was 'a welter of lies, hatred, cruelty and ignorance': the nightmare that went round the world, mocking and destroying hope. It is impossible to forgive; it may be possible to understand. Crick has not written a major biography but he has assembled more evidence than ever before, and there are enough connections to our own changes and problems to keep most of it relevant.

Raymond Williams

MEMOIRS OF A SOCIALIST BUSINESS MAN

M J Lipman

Lipman Trust 1980, £10

In an age when socialist writing is dominated by theoretical issues it makes a pleasant change to read one person's reflections on a practical life. Mick Lipman's *Memoirs* cover his experiences from just after the turn of the century until the mid 1970s. His childhood and adolescence were spent in Leeds, and he gives an account of socialist culture there as it was around the time of the First World War. His business career began in the 1920s when he took on various management jobs, after training as an engineer, in the new industry of radio production. During the 1930s and the Second World War he worked for Ekco Radio, then a household name in electrical consumer goods (Ekco was gobbled up by the Phillips multinational in the 1960s). He managed a secret radar factory for the duration of the war, and afterwards started a completely new career in East-West trade. Finally, in true gentlemanly fashion he retired to a farm in Kent, and wrote these memoirs just before his death from leukemia in 1978.

As John Saville writes in his introduction to the *Memoirs*, there is much in them to fascinate the economic and social historian. To begin with there is his description of his family life and background in Leeds. Lipman's parents were immigrants from Russia who, like many Jewish migrants, stopped in a British city rather than continuing on to the USA. They were also part of a minority who broke with religious orthodoxy and lived apart from the rest of the Jewish community in an anonymous middle class terrace. Rather unusually in such surroundings, portraits of Marx and Bakunin 'glared at each other across the dining table'.

An anecdote from his childhood will serve to introduce Mick Lipman's character. At school he was not content to be an atheist (outlandish enough at the time) — he also took delight in getting top marks for Scripture. This trait of being critical, yet striving to beat the system on its own ground explains a lot about Lipman's life as a socialist business man. After all, why should the supporters of capitalism monopolise initiative and enterprise? But this desire to be an insider and outsider at the same time was not free of tensions, reflected in his writing by a curious combination of trenchant criticisms of capitalism with jolly stories of the good life which accompanied business success. In my view the frankness with which the author tries to reconcile the apparent contradictions of his life adds to the book's interest.

Lipman gives a complete — if contentious — history of Ekco Radio, the firm to which he devoted most of his energy for sixteen years. It is not possible to summarise this here. Suffice it to say that anyone who is keen on business history will find his description of the early years of the radio industry very informative. His technical background allows him to write concisely and authoritatively about the production side of the industry's development, as well as the marketing problems, antics of rival firms and the personalities of those who pioneered mass production of radios and other electrical consumer goods. Within the limitations of a personal viewpoint, this book gives a very accurate flavour of the rough and tumble world of business in the successful part of manufacturing during the inter war period. What adds spice is the highly critical attitude he held about capitalism in general, and some of his business colleagues in particular — though he does occasionally indulge in some nostalgic might-have-beens about Ekco Radio.

The factory which he ran during the Second World War was one of the success stories of war production. Lipman vividly describes the pressures of the war economy,

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and the incongruities involved in establishing an ultra modern production line in a rural backwater. The speed with which radars had to be developed from rough designs to mass production involved many innovations in management and shopfloor methods. As a boss, Lipman seems to have had much less trouble from the branch of the Communist Party that was active in the factory than from the local middle class, who bitterly resented the fact that their domestic servants were attracted by the higher wages they could earn in factory work!

It is ironic that after being in charge of this top-secret production during the war, Lipman was eased out of Ekco Radio after the war. Apparently his left wing views were no longer acceptable in the top ranks of a firm which was hoping to get cold war rearmament orders. He therefore had to start afresh, making a new career in the untested and uncertain area of commerce with Eastern Europe. He began by selling textile machinery to Yugoslavia, then gradually worked his way round all the socialist bloc countries. Eventually he became skilled enough in the ways of trade with socialist countries to conclude such deals as the sale to the Soviet Union of a complete 'turnkey' plant for the manufacture of TV tubes. Once again, his engineering background enabled him to give a multitude of fascinating insights into the technical as well as the commercial problems of exporting capital goods to the socialist countries.

As an example of his iconoclastic approach to cold war myths about the Soviet Union it is worth quoting his observation on the West's assessment of Soviet industry: 'Any shortcoming, however trivial, is eagerly reported as indicative of their backwardness or inefficiency. On the other hand, when the military establishments want an extra hundred millions to spend . . . they go to the other extreme and exaggerate Russian prowess in the production of armaments'. By contrast with propagandist writings, Lipman's account of the successes and failures of the socialist economies as he found them has an authentic ring of truth. As he was a production engineer and expert in East-West trade his judgements are well worth reading. As he was a socialist it is also interesting to read his views on the political set-up in the socialist countries. His distaste for the repressive treatment of dissent will strike a sympathetic chord in most readers.

In short, this is a very unusual kind of book. Its value lies partly in the author's expertise, and partly in his independent and strongly held personal convictions. The historical events in which he took part have been written about many times, but probably never from this particular angle. The book will undoubtedly become a source for historians in the future, but right now it provides for any reader an entertaining diversion from the flood of theorising. If we are to recreate the kind of socialist culture described by Lipman, which flourished in Leeds before the First World War, we need a wider range of writing from a socialist viewpoint. For me, this is therefore a very welcome addition to left wing literature.

Andy Chester

MICROELECTRONICS: CAPITALIST TECHNOLOGY AND THE WORKING CLASS

CSE Microelectronics Group

CSE Books, 1981, 148pp
Pbk £2.95 *ISBN 0 906336 17 1*
Hbk £8 *ISBN 0 906336 16 3*

It is no longer news that microelectronics can cause enormous job losses, although most organisations fail to agree about exactly when and how many. Less firmly placed in the popular imagination are the likely consequences for the organisation of the waged work that is left after the devastation of the 'chip', or the reasons for the introduction of new technology. So it is particularly welcome to see the publication of a book which attempts to answer just those questions, while avoiding the trap of divorcing technology from a broader political understanding of the workings of capitalism.

Microelectronics: Capitalist Technology and the Working Class by the Conference of Socialist Economists' Microelectronics Group, is not only looking at the issue of 'who benefits' from the technology in terms of whether the working class can win shorter working hours instead of losing jobs, but also how computerisation can be developed to upgrade the content of work, rather than simultaneously deskilling and refining managerial control over it.

The CSE Group has set itself an ambitious task, with chapters covering the technology itself, its application in the office, banking, the state and different methods of manufacturing, and the question of alternative design. Writing collectively is hard enough when the focus is very particular, given this sort of range it was inevitable that the book should read at times contradictorily. The 'cement' that was constructed to hold the thing together can be found in the preface: 'Capital needs to regain command over the labour process and to increase productivity in order to raise profits; technology plays a key role in this process.'

There are dangers in tracing each application of microelectronics to a management attempt to increase control and productivity. Not because that analysis is widely off the mark, but rather that it can act to encourage a recurring desire of socialists to view managerial strategy as having a coherence and credibility it often doesn't. Similarly it can lead us to slide over contradictions and divisions within the workforce.

The CSE Microelectronics Group avoids the most frequent distortion found in left analysis — that of ignoring sexual divisions. There is an excellent discussion of how patriarchal relations in the office have helped to shore up the personalised, servicing role of women workers. This is presented as a stumbling block in managerial plans to rationalise the office and intensify the labour of its workers.

It is only by the forced separation of secretary and boss — something both sides may object to — that management dreams of an electronic office could become reality. And an onslaught on the feminine subculture in the office, through an attempt to deprive women of the social side to their waged labour, could easily backfire. Increased productivity may be bought at the price of a rebellious workforce. As Audrey Wise has said in recognition of women having a greater militancy in the work situation over conditions as opposed to wages: 'women put up a struggle to stay human'. Women being less socialised into seeing themselves as wage earners above all else, often provide male trade unionists with a justification for their judgement of women as uninterested in union matters. Yet it is precisely women's

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refusal to accept the rules of the game, or even their ignorance of what the parameters of collective bargaining usually are, which may produce the space for questions of control to be raised.

This can only be a contradictory process — that space has to be constructed, rather than it being ready and waiting. This book ends on the brave note of arguing in relation to the question of design of systems: 'Microelectronics can control a piece of equipment independently of other machines . . . work could be made much more democratic, less centralised and less hierarchical . . . It is possible to *negotiate* over the type of skills and job control at each of these levels in the hierarchy, so as to remove most of the hierarchy itself.' The book was published too quickly to deal with the trade union response so far to technological innovation, but evidence shows that trade unions are more likely to be attempting to defend the *status quo* and hold onto what jobs they can. Challenging the skill and power hierarchy, particularly given that this is so based on gender divisions — something the labour movement can hardly claim immunity from — is indeed a formidable task.

Given the book places skills and control as central issues, it is a pity that there is some ambiguity in relation to trade union involvement with alternative design. The chapter on FIAT for instance seems to argue it is dangerous for trade union officials to play an active role in the introduction of new technologies because it can lead them into taking on a management perspective while dividing them from the shop floor: 'Union officials developed a new language of 'technicalese' that separated them and their concerns from shop floor workers . . . The only reason that FIAT introduced this automation was in order to break trade union control in the plants.' (p91) Yet at other points it is argued that the design and implementation of microelectronic based systems cannot be left up to software houses or managers. On the whole the book tends to skip over the question of how alternative designs can be developed and used while avoiding the 'co-option' or defeat of trade unions and the workers they are presumed to represent.

However these discussions are controversial ones and more research and debate needs to take place for appropriate strategies to be developed. It would be less than materialist to imagine that such a prompt publication could provide a definitive analysis. It is heartening, given the importance of the problems it raises, that the book is proving popular — there is already a reprint and an intended second edition. Reaching a wide audience has obviously been a priority for the group, as the book is written in a clear and accessible style. Its popularity will presumably encourage the group to continue its work, something we can all feel enthusiastic about.

Eileen Phillips

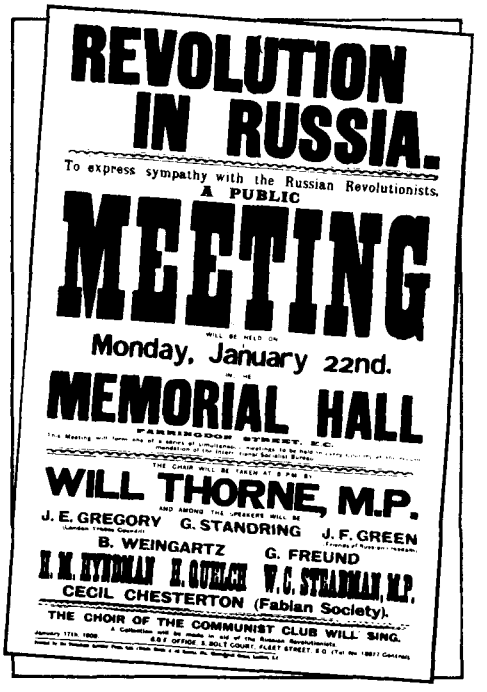
NOTES

COMMUNIST PARTY ARCHIVE

Betty Reid writes: News of great interest to students of the history of the international working class movement is the announcement by the Communist Party that it proposes to start the systematic organisation of its own archive. It has always had many enquiries from students anxious to find original material for theses on aspects of labour history, and from established authors wishing to deal with particular historical periods, with biographies of individual figures, but although it has a wealth of material it has never been able to make full use of this because it has not been sufficiently organised or accessible.

Now moving to new premises has given the opportunity to look at the whole problem afresh, and to consider how to deal with the unrivalled collection of pamphlets, leaflets, duplicated and written material, journals, newspapers, photographs, prints, posters and visual material of all kinds, issued either by the Communist Party nationally or at regional level, or by those organisations which gave it birth, and those to which it has given support over the years.

It also has the good fortune to house the tremendous collection of the late James Klugmann which includes a huge gallery of portraits of international labour movement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figures, as well as a unique collection of cartoons from the 18th century to modern times.

The major problem in attempting this work is that of finance. The Communist Party itself, in common with all other organisations, has to struggle to raise money for its own immediate needs, and cannot

Lawrence & Wishart wish to apologise to Angela Clifford and the Irish Communist Organisation for not acknowledging her copyright for three items appearing in the volume *Ireland and the Irish Question: History of Ireland, Notes for the History of Ireland*, and *Notes for the Preface to a Collection of Irish Songs* first published in 1965 by the Irish Communist Group in a pamphlet *F. Engels: History of Ireland* and subsequently republished by the Irish Communist Organisation in 1965 and 1970.

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Critica marxista
Sommario n.2, 1981

Il Pci a sessanta anni dalla fondazione
Enrico Berlinguer, Prospettiva di trasformazione e specificità comunista in Italia (intervista)
Nicola Badaloni, La questione dello Stato, il marxismo e la strategia del Pci
Giorgio Napolitano, Programma, unità e centralismo democratico
Aldo Tortorella, Momenti e problemi dell 'unità a sinistra
Giuseppe Chiarante, Laicità, questione cattolica, questione democristiana
Luciano Gruppi, Il partito di massa oggi
Riccardo Terzi, Organizzazione e politica nella realtà metropolitana
Luigi Colajanni, Il partito nella grande città meridionale: il caso di Palermo
Marcello Montanari, La questione comunista nella politologia degli anni settanta
Fulco Lanchester, Le analisi del sistema politico e il ruolo del Pci

Problemi e discussioni
Duccio Tabet, La questione agraria degli anni ottanta
Maurizio Viroli, Il dialogo fra Engels e Labriola

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Notes

finance the very considerable work that is required to establish an archive. It has made available good space and office facilities but it is clear that to carry out the work a special fund is needed. It has therefore established an Archive Fund, with its own account and trustees, entirely separate from Communist Party finances, and any money raised will be used solely for the payment of expenses directly concerned with this work. It is thought that there will be many both in and outside the Communist Party who would be willing to give financial help in order to provide the opportunity of preserving and making available such valuable material.

Donations of books of all kinds, pamphlets, papers, unsorted material, posters, photographs, minute books, journals and historical material of any kind are also welcome.

CRITICAL SOCIAL POLICY

Gail Chester writes: Critical Social Policy is a journal of socialist theory and practice in social welfare. It will provide a meeting ground for all those who believe that the provision of health services, education, housing, town planning and all other state benefits need a thorough reappraisal from a socialist, feminist and radical perspective. Each issue will contain a number of longer substantive articles, as well as short reports of political activity around welfare issues and analyses of recent developments in government social policy.

The interest in the journal has already been demonstrated by a launching conference held last autumn which attracted over 1000 participants representing the academic social science community; workers and practitioners in the welfare state, especially social workers; advice workers and others in social services; political activists in pressure groups, welfare consumer groups and community activists.

The first issue of *Critical Social Policy* includes articles on Labour's Social Policy 1974-79 by Hugh Kerr; The New Right and Social Policy by Peter Taylor-Gooby; Feminism and Social Policy by Mary McIntosh; Social Administration, Social Policy and Socialism by Bob Deacon. There is also a 'struggles' section on the fightback against the cuts in Wandsworth, 'comments' on housing policy and social security under the Tories, and book reviews.

The journal will be published 3 times a year and is available in bookshops at £2.50. Annual subscription costs £6 (for individuals in Britain) and is available from: Gordon Peters, Business Manager, *Critical Social Policy*, School of Social Work, University of Leicester, 107 Princess Rd East, Leicester LE1 7LA.

MODERN ART FROM MOZAMBIQUE

Rafael da Conceicao writes: From June 2-26 an exhibition of Mozambican art will be on show at the ILEA Centre For Learning Resources, 275 Kennington Lane, London SE11. The exhibition, organised by *Mozambique, Angola & Guiné Information Centre* (MAGIC), *ILEA* and the *National Museum Service of Mozambique* is intended to introduce to London a small representative selection of the new art being produced in this young African country. Two forms of artistic expression have been selected: painting and sculpture.

The painting section consists of a number of oils, line drawings and one silk-screen print. They have been carefully selected to give some sense of the range of work currently being produced by Mozambican

artists, most of them active members of the *Mozambican Organising Centre for the Visual Arts (OCPA)*. Painting in oils is a very recent art form in Mozambique. It emerged and established itself as a form of artistic expression in the 60s — the late colonial period. The painter, Malangatana Valente Ngwenya, who has already acquired a considerable reputation in London, is perhaps the best-known of this generation of painters.

Not surprisingly, it was in the urban centres of the country that the new medium of painting began to consolidate itself. Most of the painters represented in the exhibition, made their first contact with painting as an art form through the exhibitions which began to appear in the capital, then Lourenco Marques, in the early 1960s. By the end of the decade, a considerable market had already developed — mainly amongst the colonialist bourgeoisie — for work which 'captured the atmosphere of Africa'. It becomes clear, in retrospect, that even at this stage, two divergent lines of development had begun to appear. The first attempted a slavish duplication of currently fashionable Western techniques and themes, while the second represented the beginnings of a new type of painting altogether.

With the advent of independence in June, 1975, there took place in the arts in general, what can only be described as a cultural explosion. In the case of painting, the artists returned again and again to a passionately critical portrayal of negative and humiliating values — the collective memory of the past; while at the same time exulting in the new values and images and transforming them into powerful weapons of mass communication, education and mobilisation.

The sculpture display is in five distinct sections and represents various stages in the evolution of Makonde carving: various aspects of everyday life outside the sphere of colonialism; critical/satirical representations of the colonialist; scenes from the armed struggle and pieces in the 'Ujamaa' and 'Shetani' styles — the most recent in Makonde carving.

STATE RESEARCH

Shelley Charlesworth writes: After the campaign around the ABC trial three years ago a group of journalists and researchers launched the *State Research Bulletin*. Its aim was to uncover and publish information about the police, the military and the political Right. Most of this information is not secret, just obscure and difficult to obtain. One of the strengths of *State Research* has been its ability to gather and analyse this information and present it in a way which is useful to trade unionists, political activists and campaigners.

Recent events have shown how important this information is. Changes in policing over the last fifteen years, from policing by 'consent' to reactive 'fire brigade' methods reached their logical conclusion in the Brixton riots. *State Research* has documented this process in a new pamphlet called *Policing the Eighties: The Iron Fist*. This is a detailed account of the emergence of a 'third force' of 11,000 riot trained police, the formation of the Special Patrol Groups, and the growth of the Special Branch.

The latest *State Research Bulletin* (No 23) contains a study of police accountability. It shows the gradual erosion of local control over policing to the situation today in which all effective power is in the hands of Chief Constables and the Home Office, accountable to no one but themselves.

The bulletin can be obtained from: State Research, 9 Poland St, London W1. Subscriptions cost £5, and the pamphlet costs 60p.

Contributions to *Notes* (brief please) are welcome. We need copy before the 1st of the month preceding publication.

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BOOKMARXCLUB Spring '81

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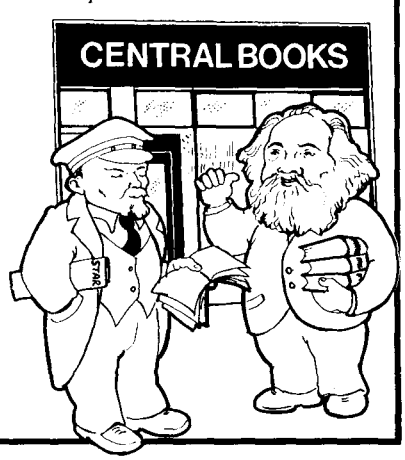

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